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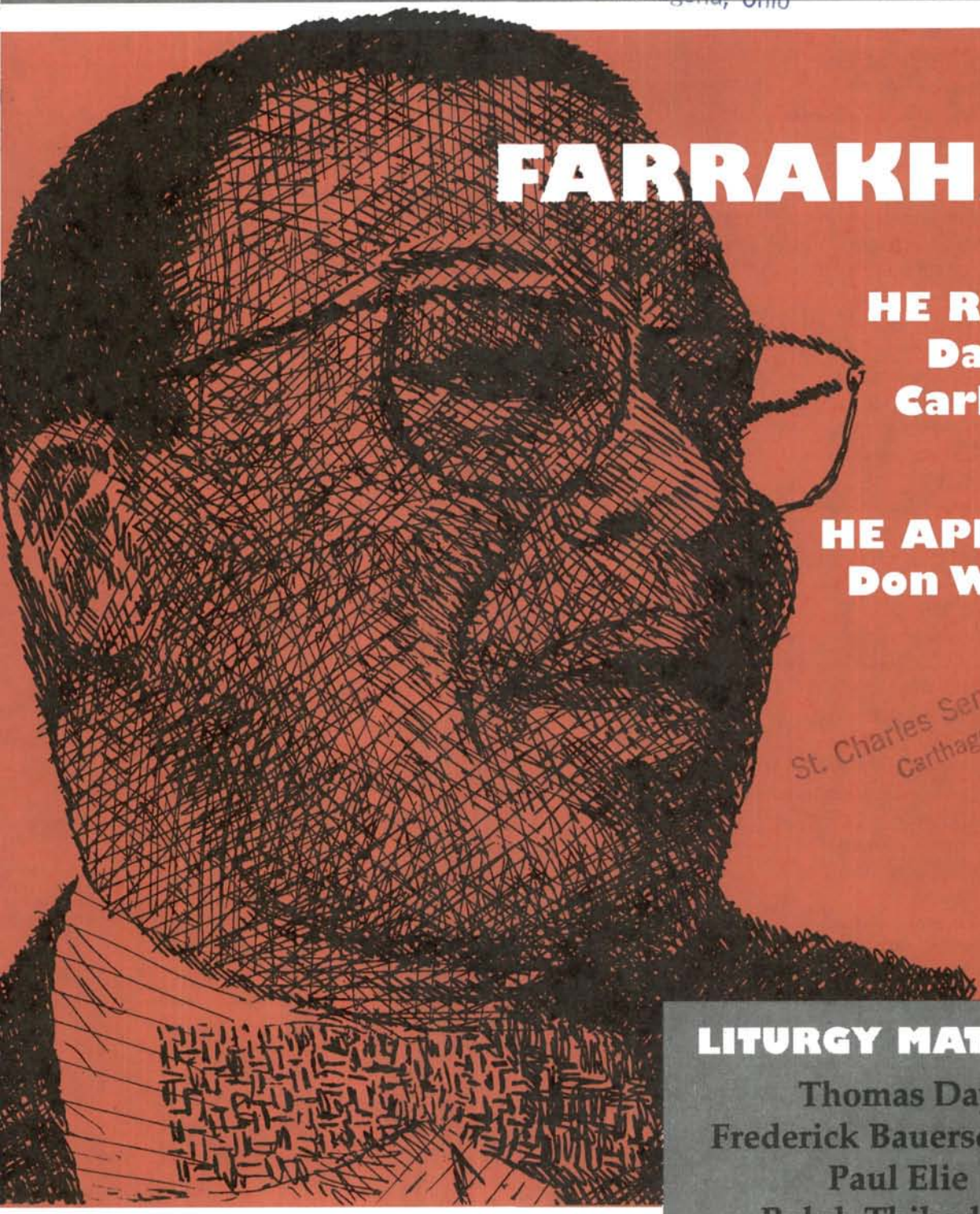

FARRAKHAN

WHY HE REPELS
David R. Carlin, Jr.

WHY HE APPEALS
Don Wycliff

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LITURGY MATTERS

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To the Editors

Respect for same-sex love

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's argument against societal sanctioning of same-sex unions, in her September 22 review of Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal*, erroneously assumes that only heterosexual marriages deserve society's respect because only these unions provide for future citizens. She does grant, however, that people marry for many reasons other than child-bearing, and that not all marriages are stable. Pragmatically, the benefits bestowed on couples by marriage are not solely related to procreation and child-rearing. The economic and legal benefits bestowed on a heterosexual married couple—tax deductions, insurance protection, inheritance benefits, legal decision making, even reduced membership fees in many organizations—aid the relationship, whether or not children are involved.

Society does indeed have an interest in promoting stable relationships that can foster emotional health in the partners, since the citizens so favored are more likely to add to the common good. The affection and commitment of a homosexual couple have the same potential for the desirable social benefits of stability, personal growth, and productivity.

If the notion of a same-sex marriage is, as Ms. Steinfels says, "deeply counter-intuitive for most people," perhaps it is because they associate marriage too exclusively with procreation and child-rearing, rather than with the relationship between the partners. Or perhaps it is because they have not learned to trust or value the deep potential for affirmative love between people of the same sex that exists in some members of society.

FRANCIS DeBERNARDO
Mt. Rainier, Md.

The writer is program director for New Ways Ministry.

The reviewer replies:

In fact, I said nothing about societal sanctioning of same-sex unions except to argue against a specific claim made by Andrew Sullivan in *Virtually Normal* about the nature of the liberal state and what it confers and recognizes when issuing a marriage license. I think Sullivan is mistaken in his claim and his analysis. Readers will find the argument on page 26 of the review. On the same page I point out that Sullivan's own characterization of the positive aspects of same-sex unions includes childlessness and sexual freedom. Why then, I ask, call it marriage at all? Why call it a stable relationship if it does not include fidelity?

Andrew Sullivan could have said a great deal more on the subject of same-sex unions, but he didn't. And so neither did I. The confines of a "reply" are hardly conducive to expanding on a difficult and complex subject. If Mr. DeBernardo has not read *Virtually Normal*, I urge him to do so; he may find that he does not share Mr. Sullivan's characterizations of same-sex unions.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

Desacralized? Why?

As one of the relatively few married priests in the church in the United States (a former Anglican priest, received into the church and ordained under the terms of the 1980 special pastoral provision), I am both deeply grateful to the Holy See and to my own diocesan bishop for making my present priestly ministry possible, and extremely reluctant to make a point in the debate over priestly celibacy.

Nevertheless, I was greatly interested in the contribution to that debate made by David R. Carlin, Jr. ["On the Way to the Altar," October 20], and I share much of his perplexity with the partisans of both positions. But there is a notable omission in what he writes, the begging of an important question, and the absence of one dimension in the matter.

First, Carlin makes no reference to what must surely be the relevant fact that there are already married priests, in significant numbers, at work in the Roman Catholic church—not only those who, like me, have come from what Pope Paul VI called the "legitimate patrimony" of an Anglican background, but also Catholic priests of the Eastern rite. All this experience must surely constitute at least the beginnings of the accumulation of relevant evidence.

Second, the more I think about it the more disturbed I am by Mr. Carlin's implication that the married priesthood is inevitably a desacralized priesthood. Apart from the fact that, subjectively, I cannot accept this as a characterization of my own ministry—which, I insist, is *very* distinguishable from that of "Presbyterian ministers"—I have to say that I have known, from the days of my childhood in an Anglican presbytery, very many austere, devout, disciplined, holy Anglican priests and bishops whose lives have been totally centered in the daily offering of the sacrifice of the altar, the recitation of the divine office, the preaching of the faith, and the care of the poor. And their families, almost always in the most modest of material circumstances, have been models of what every Christian household should be: the Kingdom of God in miniature, as my own father said to my wife and to me as he preached at our wedding thirty-one years ago. That is not to say that there have not been other, less admirable, examples. But certainly the same can

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Give
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(*see* page 16)

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COMMONWEAL

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be said of some Catholic priests. And the sacrament of holy matrimony is belittled and devalued if it is regarded as an agent of desacralization for a priest or anyone else.

Third, Carlin makes no mention of the ecumenical perspective for the debate over celibacy. The unity of Eastern and Western Christendom is eagerly sought and prayed for, but it is hardly likely to be furthered by the writing off of the married priesthood of Orthodoxy as desacralized and a "contradiction in terms."

(REV.) ALLAN R. G. HAWKINS
Arlington, Tex.

No shortage? Hey!

In "On the Way to the Altar," David R. Carlin, Jr. asks, "....[H]ow do we know there is a shortage of priests?...[T]here must be some right number we have in mind."

Why not start with a minimum of one pastor and one assistant in every church—including those that have been closed in consolidations for lack of priests to staff them?

Mr. Carlin charges the "promarriage party" with saying "silly things like 'This will solve the priest shortage.'" I have been a supporter of the "promarriage" (optional celibacy) party since its inception, and I have never heard or seen a claim that permitting priests to marry would prove the whole solution to the priest-shortage problem.

Let seminary faculties argue the precise meaning of the word shortage. But to get a real-world feel for the situation, go to a church where there is no Mass, and a lay eucharistic minister distributes Communion because there is (excuse the expression) a shortage of priests.

NORMAN C. MCKENNA
Silver Spring, Md.

Privatized justice?

Edward Gaffney, Jr., misses a dramatic current trend in his otherwise cogent comments ["The Poor Need Lawyers," October 6] when he suggests that "no one is seriously proposing the privatization of the judicial system."

In fact there is increasing corporate and trade association emphasis on using mandatory arbitration provisions in commonly used contracts. Many such provisions call for binding arbitration before trade-association-sponsored panels.

The practice is growing rapidly, with the result that in many civil cases a person's rights are now often determined by judges who are not publicly appointed but privately selected and paid. Whether on balance such alternative dispute resolutions help or hinder the poor or less advantaged can be argued both ways.

VINCENT W. THORPE
Woodland Hills, Calif.

"We find the defendant guilty, but not as charged."

Keep the feds out

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.'s article "The Poor Need Lawyers" is an example of the fuzzy logic that continues to embarrass liberal causes.

Gaffney's premise—the poor need lawyers because the rich and powerful need lawyers—is wrong. The rich and powerful need lawyers because they do business with one another. The only business transaction common among poor people is an occasional landlord-tenant agreement or dealing with the government. States can (and often do) deal with landlord-tenant disputes by regulations which avoid lawyers altogether.

Gaffney's conclusion is incorrect even if his premise isn't. After accusing the Republicans of making a fetish of protecting the rich, Gaffney does the same for the poor members of by concluding the federal government must intervene for the poor to have appropriate access to the civil courts. Nowhere does he explain why the U.S. government must ride to the rescue. States are capable of making policy decisions about how the poor should be treated. Some states, such as California, may provide more liberal assistance than the federal government; others, such as Idaho, might provide no assistance at all. In all cases the level of service will reflect what the community believes is important. This is a polite way of saying that federal funding of legal services seems a ploy by Gaffney and his ilk to substitute ideology for obtaining the consent of the governed.

Gaffney shows himself to be an old liberal by continuing to ignore the middle class. Unlike the poor, members of the middle class engage in a variety of business dealings and are usually poorly represented. Instead of promoting massive federal subsidies to lawyers for the poor, new liberals can reclaim middle-class support by backing state legislation enabling the middle class to recover their attorneys'

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Attention & praise

Worship "is the metabolism of Christian life," wrote Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan. Its lifeblood, soul, and pulse. No wonder the reform of the Roman liturgy remains such a point of contention among Catholics, thirty years after the close of Vatican II. As this issue of *Commonweal* illustrates, Catholics seem enmeshed in an unending quest for the right liturgical chemistry.

The areas of concern—and sometimes controversy—are manifold: language, music, deportment, gender, even the nature of ecclesiology. Why such upheaval? First, as the late Mark Searle once observed in these pages ("Renewing the Liturgy—Again," November 18, 1988), Vatican II changed not only the way Catholics *do* liturgy but the way they *think* about it. For the council (re)envisioned the Christian community as the worshiping body of Christ. The liturgical changes that Vatican II inaugurated were meant to underscore Christ's presence not simply in the ordained priest and the eucharistic species, but in the Scripture proclamations *and* in the assembly itself. The latter was to be transformed from a group of passive and often isolated individual spectators into a community activated, in Searle's words, by its "conscious participation in the redemptive work of Christ." From now on, the community was to experience the Red Sea waters, the hill of Calvary, the road to Emmaus.

Such statements as Searle's are evocative and deeply challenging, but despite their eloquence and correctness, they can still leave one with a sense that the basic liturgical dilemma the church faces has not been addressed. That dilemma, Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann observed in *For the Life of the World* (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), is that we live, move, and pay our taxes in an all-encompassing secular age, one that questions the very notion of worship. Schmemann described secularism as a type of heresy, not because it is concerned with *denying* the attributes or even the existence of God, but because it seeks to delimit the nature of the human person. For the secularist, human beings—their drives, emotions, personal teleologies—can be understood entirely in terms of molecules and neutrons.

Liturgical reform in a secularized ethos, then, requires dealing with very sticky issues at very high stakes, as both Thomas Day (page 11) and Frederick C. Bauerschmidt (page 14) illustrate. Renewing the liturgy is not simply a matter of "cleaning up" old rites or concocting "relevant" language and new choreographies (*see*, Ralph Thibodeau, John C. Cort, and David O'Rourke, also in this issue). As difficult and sometimes distracting as such work can be, however, it is necessary. For each generation must rediscover the power of worship. Only when we have tasted it and been transformed by it will we want to share it with and "for" the world.

During the conclusion of his address at the United Nations last month, Pope John Paul II spoke of "the radiant humanity of Christ" as being the basis of Christian hope for the world and care for each human person. The pope's own sense of that "radiant humanity" was clearly in evidence two days later when he presided over the liturgy at New York's Central Park. Paul Elie's engaging description of that

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event (page 9) catches both the occasion's ordinariness and its transcendence. For good liturgy is not an escape from reality, it is an engagement with it, a heightening of it.

"You are here not out of simple curiosity to see the pope," John Paul instructed, "but because of the Mass," the "most sacred rite of our faith." Solemn and vital was the liturgy that foggy morning, with processions, rock and operatic voices, a polyglot of prayers, readings, and faces, and splendid silences. And after it was all over, as he prepared to leave the park, the pope told the throng: "This has been a wonderful occasion. First, for me...to have seen and prayed with so many people, especially so many young people [applause]. I hope it was also an important moment for all of you...a time to renew your commitment to Christ and to the church, to strengthen your service to those in need." In a sentence or two he had summarized the purpose of liturgy and the point of renewal. "We are all together in Christ," he said, his strong voice rising. And no one who heard him that morning doubted it.

"I thank you for that secret praise/ Which burns in every creature," writes the poet Anne Porter (*see* review, page 23), and her own words are an exquisitely rendered act of attention and praise. When we are tempted to give up on the reform of the liturgy, of ever recovering the sacred and the beautiful in our worship, we should listen to poets like Porter. They tell us that by our work and patience we will win our souls. □

ET CETERA

LOUIS WHO? ■ The Million Man March gave Minister Louis Farrakhan media attention previously denied him. Anti-Semitic statements—and bigoted statements about almost everyone else—have left most whites troubled and mystified by Farrahkan's appeal and staying power. But the sheer size of the march—450,000-850,000 (big, no matter whose crowd estimate you accept)—and the heart-felt outpouring of the marchers has given everyone pause. On page eight of this issue, Don Wycliff gets to the heart of the matter: What is Farrakhan's appeal? Farrahkan can criticize blacks in a way no one else can or dares to do. He calls his fellow African-Americans to account in religious language—or better, religious languages—from Christian to Islamic to Judaic—and mystical ones—numerological, Masonic, and Islamic. (Debbi Wilgoren analyzes the sources and meaning of this language in the *Washington Post Weekly*, October 30-November 5.) The appeal of Farrakhan is explored in two essays in the *New Republic* (November 6), very much worth looking up. Glenn C. Loury, who criticized the march beforehand and attended anyway, emphasizes the religious appeal, but worries about the "grievance politics" that lie behind it and the identity politics that follow from it. Loury writes: "The call of the tribe is seductive, but ultimately it is a siren call. As comforting as the prospect may seem, the truth, for all of us, is that we can't go home again." Orlando Patterson explores the paradox of success: integration having brought whites and blacks together "makes it almost impossible for black Americans to recognize what they have achieved."

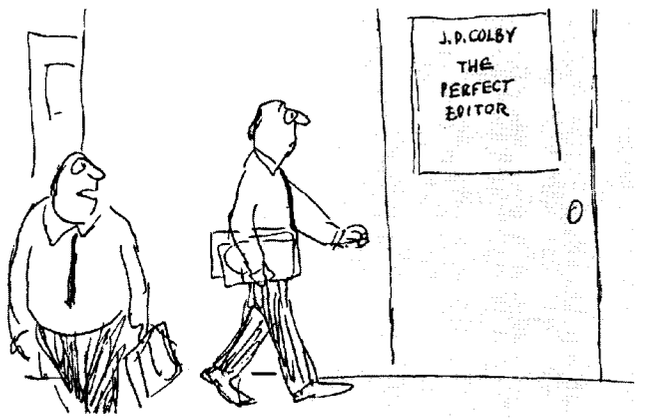
If nothing else, the Million Man March jump-started a national and very public conversation on race that is too often white-dominated and as a consequence perhaps over-celebratory of the achievements of the 1960s.

THE OLD HUBRIS AND THE NEW ■ In a symposium on "The National Project" in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Commentary* (November 1995), Andrew Ferguson, senior editor of the *Weekly Standard*, issues a word of caution to his fellow conservatives. "Alas, calls to national panic, such as we are hearing from the Right today, and as we have heard from the Left perpetually, do not encourage humility. Yet humility is what we require most of all when we set about to improve the lot of vast numbers of people or even whole countries. Liberalism perished of pride. The vanguard of the conservative resurgence...would do well to consider the fate, and consequences, of a political philosophy that proves overweening when it gets its chance to strut the stage."

Thirty-eight pages later in the same issue Richard John Neuhaus, editor-in-chief of *First Things*, struts just a bit over the rout of the "overclass" in the liberal churches, prestige media, and universities. "We are left with the bothersome question: can the opponents of the overclass, in their triumph, produce a ruling class that effectively proposes the commanding truths by which alone a culture can flourish? Can it be done without the participation of the members of the overclass who have these thirty years devoted their lives to cultural treason? Perhaps the question is premature. The retreat is still under way. Later we can discuss the terms of surrender, which should be generous."

But can we keep Alsace-Lorraine?

THANKS BUT NO ■ A staffer well up in years got a letter that began: "The coming year for the Society of Professional Journalists plans to be one of the most exiting and you need to be a part of it." Of four other staffers, all accomplished proofreaders, only one understood why their colleague said, "No way!" Now you try.



"Be careful."

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DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

WHY FARRAKHAN REPELS

The pathology of anti-Semitism

I don't know if you can bear reading yet one more commentary on the O. J. Simpson verdict's public reception and the Million Man March. I know I can hardly bear writing it, so tragic are the realities symbolized by these events.

The reaction to the Simpson verdict was a flash of lightning in the night, illuminating a terrible landscape. Whites in general deplored the verdict while blacks generally applauded it. After three decades of "integration" we saw the depressing truth: we were still two nations.

Mid-October's Million Man March was more discouraging still. Here was the consecration of an anti-Semite as part of the mainstream leadership of black America. How far downhill we have slid since Martin Luther King, Jr., who reminded Americans of their common humanity, reminded us that we are equally children of God. This universalistic viewpoint is foreign to Minister Farrakhan, who teaches that Jews are "bloodsuckers."

When I say we have slid downhill since the days of King, this "we" includes Americans generally. Metaphorically speaking, black and white America may be two nations, but in literal fact we belong to a single nation. The appalling state in which vast numbers of lower-class blacks have been living for years now—rife with almost every imaginable social pathology—has hurt all Americans. A disease in one area of the body politic is an illness in the body as a whole.

The conferring of respectability on Louis Farrakhan, his elevation to the status of respectable leadership, is yet another disaster for African-Americans; hence a disaster for all Americans.

Compounding this are the apologetics of those, both black and white, who deny that any disaster has taken place. "Oh, sure," they tell us, "Farrakhan may have a few controversial ideas, and we certainly don't agree with everything he says. But he has a far larger number of excellent ideas, for example, his endorsement of such values as clean living, crime avoidance, spousal fidelity, parental responsibility, hard work, self-discipline, and self-reliance. Don't nitpick about details. Keep focused on his predominant message. Besides, you have to separate the message from the messenger." In other words, the inconvenience of a certain amount of anti-Semitism is a small price to pay for the good effect Farrakhan's sermons are likely to have. The twentieth century, which has been the most homicidal century in human history, has taught a number of lessons that all but *moral* imbeciles should have learned by now. One of these is that anti-Semitism is wrong; and not just a little wrong, but terribly wrong. This being so, anti-Semites must be kept out of the circle of respectability. You shouldn't go to dinner with them, and you certainly shouldn't participate in their political rallies. You shouldn't confer legitimacy on them, nor should you disgrace yourself by becoming apologists for them.

Matthew Arnold used certain lines of poetry as "touchstones." The quality of other poetry might be debatable, but there are some lines, he said, whose merit is beyond doubt. They are absolute gems, the gold standard. As such, they can serve as measures for all other poetry. Now in a morally skeptical age, such as ours is, we badly need moral touchstones—a few absolutes we can be sure of, guides for our murky journey through morally questionable terrain. Our civilization used to be well endowed with moral absolutes, but we are now reduced to a relative handful. "You mustn't poison the guide dog of a blind person" is one example of a moral rule that all of us, even the most lunatic of multiculturalists, still subscribe to. Until the other day, "You mustn't be an anti-Semite" was another. Once call these touchstones into doubt, and we are lost completely.

Modernists, as part of their program of liquidating what they see as the archaic and overly conservative morality of the Stoic-Christian tradition, have often adopted a utilitarian morality; that is, they have held that actions are to be evaluated purely in terms of consequences. This means that otherwise wicked conduct becomes virtuous if it promises to produce a large enough harvest of beneficial results. Moral flexibility becomes the golden rule. Thus it is permissible to lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery, etc., provided these actions are likely to produce an abundance of good results. It is doubtful this rule of morality has in fact produced many beneficial results; but there is no question that it has done wonders to ease the conscience of those inclined to lying, cheating, stealing, and philandering. It also eased the conscience of Stalin and his associates, who, though they murdered and enslaved millions, did so with the benign intention of producing an eventual heaven on earth. The same goes for Hitler and company, who were convinced that humanity would be far happier living in a *Judenrein* world. In resolute hands, utilitarianism is a kind of moral alchemy, turning base actions into gold.

The utilitarian mentality is at work when we justify Farrakhan on the grounds that, despite his anti-Semitism, he will produce good results. His case is small potatoes, I suppose, when compared with Hitler and Stalin; but from small potatoes (if I may mix vegetable metaphors) mighty oaks have grown.

Anti-Semitism is pernicious. Period. It is not, nor can it come to, good. Black America was badly enough off yesterday; today, having Farrakhan among its leaders, it is even worse off. And so are we all. □

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Don Wycliff

WHY FARRAKHAN APPEALS

Touching the souls of black folk

Not since the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, has black leadership spoken in a genuine, effective way to the souls of black folk. Not, that is, until October 16 and the Million Man March.

The genius of the event—which is to say the genius of Louis Farrakhan, who conceived it—was to couch its purpose in religious terms: atonement, reconciliation, recommitment to God, women, family, and community. In so doing, he spoke to the *souls* of black folk in a way that not even Jesse Jackson had managed to in the twenty-seven years since Dr. King's death. In so doing, he transformed the Million Man March into an occasion for re-fusing a severed cord, for reconnecting with the hopeful, faith-filled religious tradition that King represented and that seemed to fall into decay after his murder. I am convinced that this religious aspect, as much as anything else, accounted for the huge turnout and the undeniable success of the march.

Let me start with the obligatory disclaimers: I am no fan of Farrakhan. His protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, I believe that he is anti-Semitic and that that is abhorrent. (I also think he wishes in a strange sort of way that he could stop being so, but he seems constitutionally incapable of it.) He also is anti- a lot of other things that no truly decent, God-fearing, God-loving person ought to be, including a couple that touch me intimately (anti-interracial marriage and anti-Catholic). As a result of all this, it's hard to tell when Farrakhan speaks whether it is God's messenger one is hearing or a silver-tongued devil doing an impression of God. I choose to believe that, in the Million Man March, it was the former.

All his hatreds aside, one thing is clear about Farrakhan: He loves black people. He loves them so much that he has made himself hated by virtually every other group in this nation to prove his love for blacks. He loves them so much that he will criticize them as no white person and darn few black people could. Indeed, he boasted about that in his overlong (but far more coherent than most critics gave it credit for being) speech at the Million Man March. "I point out the evils of black people like no other leader does," Farrakhan declared, "but my people don't call me anti-black, because they know I must love them in order to point out what's wrong so we can get it right to come back into the favor of God!"

One other thing also is certain: Farrakhan, a Muslim, employs Christian and Judaic religious themes more effectively than almost any other prominent contemporary preacher. He did it to powerful effect in his Million Man March address, and in the process summoned up memories of that old religious tradition of which Dr. King was the greatest exemplar.

Many commentators have made the obvious unfavorable comparison between Farrakhan's speech and that of Dr. King at the 1963 March on Washington. Fair enough. But what seems more noteworthy is how accustomed all of us, black people and white, have become over the last quarter-century to hearing so-called black leaders talk like bureaucrats and policy wonks. No wonder their leadership has been so empty and feckless. Their oratory—like their policy prescriptions—never seems to rise above a ringing endorsement of "a Marshall Plan for the cities" or some other such cliché. Even so brilliant a thinker and orator as Jesse Jackson has been ensnared by policythink and policytalk.

But what black people have needed and wanted was someone who could make sense of their plight, someone who could explain, in an uplifting and ennobling way, their existential condition. Or to put it more soulfully, someone who could answer Louis Armstrong's musical question: "What did I do to be so black and blue?" That requires not the prose of the policy wonk, but the poetry of the preacher steeped in Scripture. So listen to Farrakhan: "And if God were to answer us today he would say to black people, 'Yes, I allowed this to happen. And I know you suffered, but Martin King, my servant, said it: Undeserved suffering is redemptive'....

"He said, 'Black man, I love you.' He said, 'But God, I mean, that's a heck of a way to show you love me.' He said, 'But I love my son. I love Jesus more than I love any of our servants. But I had a cross for him. I had nails for him....But I loved him more than anybody else.'"

When did we last hear anyone speak in that way to the souls of black folk?

So the march is now almost a month in the past. Will it have any lasting benefit or effect, or will it turn out to have been just a momentary high? My bet is that it will turn out to be as important for black people—and for the nation as a whole—as was the 1963 march, which provided the momentum for the great civil rights laws.

The Million Man March amounted to a declaration by black people that they will not be defined any longer merely as victims. That definition, which many black leaders actively sought and cultivated over the last quarter-century ("We don't want to let white folks off the hook") has been crippling to African-Americans and profoundly irritating to race relations. It can only be good to have it eradicated and replaced with a different image, one of black men and women as strong, striving, self-determining people, working hard, raising families, guiding children. Once that old image is shed and the new one replaces it, I expect there will be more of a disposition among white and other Americans to lend a hand. It's a basic fact of life: Nobody goes out of his way to help someone who doesn't at least give the appearance of trying to help himself.

I see nothing but good ahead because of the Million Man March. And it's all because it touched the souls of black folk. □

Don Wycliff *is the editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

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Paul Elie

MASS IN ORDINARY

The pope in my park

Anna Quindlen once said that the main effect of Vatican II in her parish was that women no longer had to wear hats to Mass. This remark captures the mood at John Paul II's Mass in Central Park last month, which made clear just how deeply the church of starched wimples and pressed school uniforms has become reconciled to the trappings of American culture—not so much the culture of death but the culture of T-shirts and baggy jeans and body piercing, of picnic blankets and The Wave—and made these changes seem, for a morning at least, a good thing.

You might not have known it from the media coverage of the pope's visit, which focused on how giant the portable altars were, how vast the crowds, how snarled the traffic wherever the pope went. Even the local-color stories stressed the extreme and the ecstatic: the faithful who anticipated the pope's visit for over a year, rose at an ungodly hour to get a good place to stand, then wept as he arrived, overwhelmed by the experience of a lifetime. All that was doubtless true—but what struck me as profound about the Mass on the Great Lawn was the ease and everyday *bonhomie* I saw in the people around me. This most spectacular of Masses celebrated, and sanctified, the ordinary.

Granted, I was able to regard the event as ordinary because I was spared the ordeal of getting a ticket. No lottery for me: I simply wrote to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a press pass was waiting for me. Ticket holders had been told to arrive at dawn, but I woke after seven in my apartment not far from Central Park, had a leisurely cup of coffee, and stopped to get a bagel on my way to the subway.

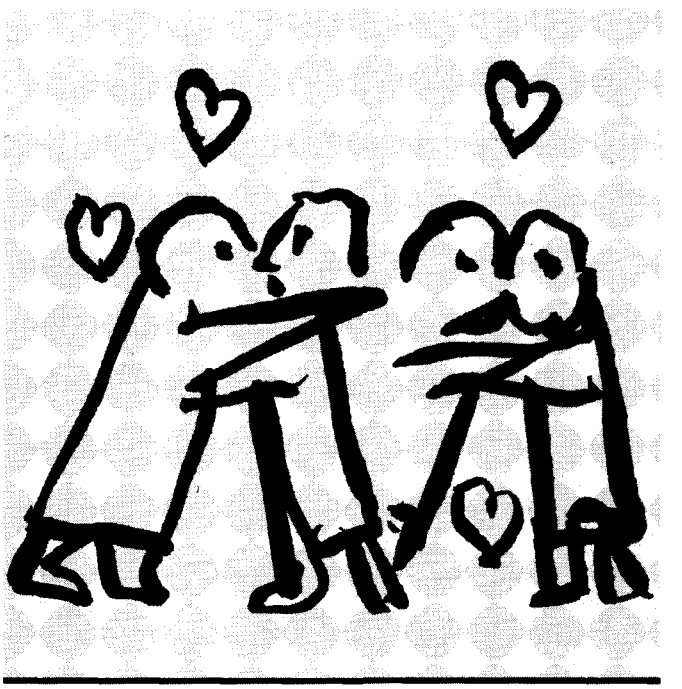
Fifteen minutes later I was in the park. Crowds were still streaming in: red-ticket holders this way, white that way, and Credentials to the Delacorte Theater, near the altar. At the theater, a husky guy wearing an earphone pointed out that I was just *general* press. I would have to enter at 82nd and Central Park West. There I went, but was finally directed to *86th* Street—where a police officer told me to go to the Central Park police precinct house.

It was nearly nine, the time the pope would arrive. I spied another of my kind, a woman with a pass dangling from a chain around her neck. Where were we supposed to go? We shrugged and shook hands. Claudia was from ABC News, but she was there for herself. We gamboled toward the precinct house.

Fifteen minutes later, we found ourselves at the Delacorte again. As it happened, we were in the right place at the right time. The crowd roared, and we looked up—and there, less than ten paces away, was John Paul, waving from his popemobile, framed by the arch of the metal detector and the canvas canopy of the press tent. It was a perfect tableau of his papacy.

We ended up in the crowd a third of the way back on the Great Lawn, just close enough to distinguish the pope's yellow vestments from the white vestments surrounding him. "We're better off here—this is where the real story is," Claudia said. She was right. The key demographic trends in the church in the U.S. were manifest around us, body and soul: the mix of whites, blacks, and Hispanics; the preponderance of young people, and the congregants' casual fluency in American culture. Claudia and I were dressed as though for a morning of picking apples or raking leaves—she in a red sweatshirt and black jeans, I in a Patagonia pullover—and we might have been out of place among the faithful representing their parishes. Not so. No one had dressed up for the experience of a lifetime. To one side stood a couple straight from the J. Crew Catalog. Up ahead four Hispanic women wearing roll-up plastic rain bonnets took turns standing on an overturned bucket. Behind us a woman in a baby-T and jeans rolled her hips so her tanned belly showed to best advantage. A teen-age boy in a green T-shirt kissed his hand and thrust it heavenward; piety aside, he might have been a skateboard youth.

The Mass went as has been reported: the readings in Spanish and English, the effusive homily, the intentions in many languages, the pope's quavering rendition of a Polish carol, the Communion hymn sung by Placido Domingo. It was not an anticipatory Sunday Mass but a Saturday Mass, with just two readings. The pope gained presence as he exchanged his miter for a zucchetto and stood to perform the Liturgy of the Eucharist—following the same sequence followed by most every other priest, everywhere. The unity of



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the church in the liturgy—often thought to have been lost with the Latin Mass—was palpable.

The familiarity of the rite could be felt in the crowd as well. At the kiss of peace, strangers shook hands, same as always. For Communion, hundreds of priests scattered through the crowd, each accompanied by a Boy Scout who sheltered him from the rain with a yellow-and-white umbrella. No umbrella came our way, though: I received from a Hispanic priest who, lacking a chalice, proffered the sacrament from a sandwich baggie.

Then the Mass was over, and we went in peace. The orderliness of the crowd's exit was notable, but even more so was the swiftness—walking toward Central Park West, Claudia and I trailed a French horn player who had performed the "Hallelujah Chorus" postlude just moments earlier.

It was half past twelve. All 125,000 of us—not least the pope—had things to do, places to be. It had been a day to remember, yet it was just another in the length of days unfolding—the Saturday of the Twenty-sixth Week in Ordinary Time. I said good-by to Claudia and I walked up Broadway, as I'd done on countless Saturday mornings. Couples clutched on their way to brunch. Mail carriers toted their sacks from door to door. I stopped at a record shop, looking for the *Y'All* CD, and bought some light bulbs at the hardware store. I was home by one o'clock, a whole day still ahead of me. It had been a good morning. □

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Catherine & Teresa: Doctors of the church

Twenty-five years ago, Paul VI broke precedent by declaring Catherine of Siena (1347-80) and Teresa of Avila (1515-82) "doctors" of the church. They are the only women so honored.

The tradition of naming doctors of the church began with Venerable Bede (d. 735), who described Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory as "significant interpreters" of the Gospel of Luke. The official designation "doctor of the church" came into vogue only centuries later, in 1295, when Boniface VIII instructed that the title be used of these "Latin doctors" in liturgical celebrations. In 1567, Pius V bestowed the title on Thomas Aquinas, and the following year on Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom (the four Eastern doctors). Over the centuries, some thirty doctors of the church, all male, all priests (except Ephraem the Deacon) were named.

In the eighteenth century, Prospero Lambertini (later Benedict XIV), in a treatise on the requirements for a doctor of the church, wrote that the candidate had to be outstanding for holiness and distinguised doctrinal teaching; only a pope or general council could make the declaration. Lambertini presumed that the honor was a male prerogative. That presumption, based on the Pauline epistles (I Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-15), had been reinforced by Aquinas when he argued that women could not be public teachers in the church. (Felipe Sega, the papal nuncio in Madrid at the time of Teresa, had called her "a restless and gadabout woman teaching as a mistress against the orders of Saint Paul.")

In 1922, during the three-hundredth anniversary of Teresa's canonization, the University of Salamanca posthumously conferred on her the degree *doctor honoris causa*, and the bishop of Avila asked Pius XI to declare her a doctor of the church. "*Obstat sexus*"—her sex stands in the way—was the papal response. But, the pope added: "I leave the delicate question to be decided by my successor."

Paul VI was that eventual successor and less than two months after the conclusion of Vatican II, he instructed the Congregation of Rites to investigate whether "the title and cult of doctor of the church [may] be granted to women, who by their holiness and outstanding doctrine have greatly contributed to the common good of the church." Cardinal Larrone, head of the congregation, charged a Carmelite, a Dominican, a Franciscan, and a Jesuit to study the question, and on December 17, 1967, the congregation endorsed their positive response.

Uncharacteristically, Paul VI anticipated the decision. On October 15, 1967, Teresa's feast, he said "we intend one day to accord her [Teresa] and Saint Catherine of Siena the title doctor of the church." And so he did, three years later on September 27, 1970, saying that he was "acknowledging" rather than "conferring" the title on her. A week later he celebrated Catherine's "charism of wisdom in the Holy Spirit." He noted that both doctors were deeply ecclesial women whose writings are Christian classics.

Since then, too little attention has been paid to Paul's prophetic recognition. This twenty-fifth anniversary should encourage more creative exploration of the role of women as teachers in the church.

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A FAILING STAR SYSTEM

Bad liturgy transcends ideology

Thomas Day

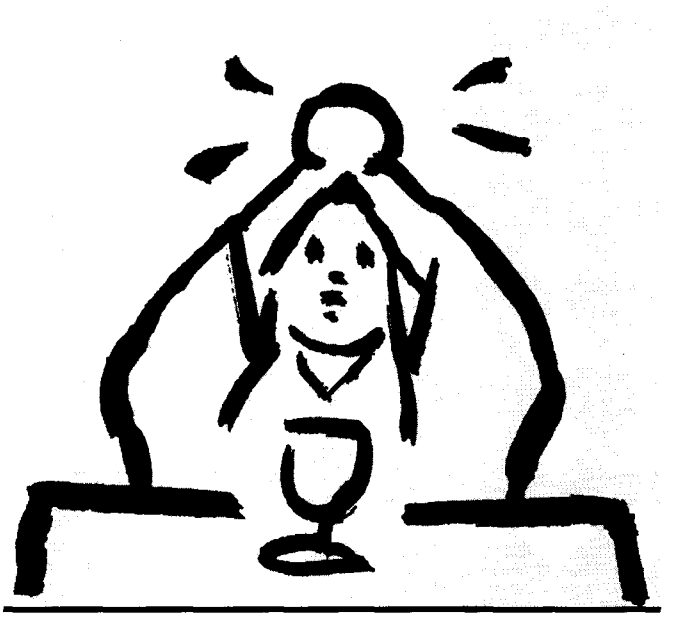
Could you please tell me: *What do they want?* The exasperated acquaintance who asked me this question is a Protestant and a very conscientious organist; she had recently agreed to help a suburban Roman Catholic parish with the liturgical music for its Saturday Masses, and she was baffled.

She told me that most of the parish's music was confined to a narrow selection of "contemporary songs," which the parishioners did not sing with any particular gusto. When she suggested that the parish might want to broaden its repertory to include some standard hymns and other compositions in the missalette, she received a lecture: The revolution in the Catholic church required a revolution in its music. All this lecturing she could take, but what really bothered her were the little cutting remarks she would receive from the pastor and his staff about her "classical" music—a broad category which included any music that sounds "churchy." The organ music of the Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach, the melodies of Gregorian chant, choral music, and even a lot of Protestant hymns were all under suspicion in this parish because of their "classical," "churchy" sound. My acquaintance was mystified. "*What did they want?*" I responded by informing her that her situation was not unusual and that her days as an employee of that church were probably numbered.

I hear regularly about yet another Catholic parish or chapel—even a cathedral—that has fired a competent organist and tossed into the trash its musical repertory, built up over the years, all in an effort to cleanse the place of "classical" music. Sometimes I even hear about a Protestant church that has proudly discarded its "churchy" music (including most hymns) and is packing in people by the thousands. But Catholics are far ahead in this area. In fact, I would estimate that more than half of the Catholic parishes and chapels in the United States are places where the congregation sings or hears very little music written before the 1970s. If they do happen to sing an old hymn or Christmas carol, the music might be accompanied in a way that suggests "easy listening" rock. Some Catholic parishes do go back to their musical roots, at least occasionally, and there are many churches that shift back and forth between the old, "classical" traditions and "contemporary hits." But, whatever the case, they all have to fight against a powerful wave of "anticlassical" sentiment. Exactly what does the "anticlassical" faction want? Why have its adherents seceded from their own musical heritage in such great numbers?

The explanation heard most frequently is that "those conservatives and liberals are at it again." The conservatives supposedly want "classical" music because it symbolizes tradition, authority, adherence to unchanging values, and a remote God who is *transcendent*; the liberals supposedly want music that gives the impression of a breaking free from a stuffy, deadening past, and a surrender to a God who is *immanent* and part of our lives, here and now. This explanation—the eternal clash of conservative and liberal viewpoints—has the virtue of neatness, but life is not neat. I have met priests who are more conservative than the Roman Curia, and their idea of "classical" music for the liturgy is an assortment of rousing Protestant hymns. I have met priests who would describe themselves as "liberal" and they love Gregorian chant.

This distinction between transcendence in worship (pre-Vatican II, "classical," repressive, bad) and immanence (post-Vatican II, "contemporary," energizing, good) is fashionable today and even useful but, it easily becomes another way of forcing an either/or neatness onto complexity. If you read the lives of the saints, you notice how, in the past,



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Catholics managed the complex job of worshiping a God who is "other" (and can only be expressed in rituals that are somehow transcendent) but, at the same time, immanent (and the motivation for doing saintly things, from prayer to social action in the world).

I stopped believing in neatness when I read about a recent theological controversy in a seminary run by the Benedictines. A committee of bishops and seminary rectors had visited this very distinguished institution to investigate rumors of incorrect theological teaching. The committee had ordered that one teacher, a nun, be fired because she advocated the ordination of women. In addition, another error had surfaced that needed to be corrected. Seminarians who were not Benedictines would henceforth not be permitted to sing morning prayer in Gregorian chant (mostly in English) with the monks, because that sort of thing is useless for their future pastoral work. Apparently, in the orthodox Catholic church of the future, Gregorian chant will have no place in the parishes or the seminary training of diocesan priests.

Another justification for the removal of "classical" music in many Catholic and Protestant churches runs like this: "Listen to what is on radio and television; look at what is sold in stores. Most people today want to hear pop music, especially rock, not the classics. If the church wants to reach these people, especially the young, it must communicate with them in a cultural language they understand. Today, a pop music style is that language."

This sounds eminently common-sensical, but the logic collapses if you switch the statement to another time or era. Imagine someone in 1940 saying, "The swing band sound is what people want. If the church is going to reach contemporary Christians, it must abandon its classics and use the swing band sound." Such tortured reasoning comes across as laughable, yet it is not unusual today to hear some Catholics and Protestants brag about their cultural chauvinism, insisting that only music which represents "us" (our style, our culture, today) deserves to be sung in church.

But, risible or not, the reality is complex. The fact is, the Catholic church, throughout history, has constantly tried to modernize its music. Over the centuries, all kinds of doubtful "improvements" were made to Gregorian chant, so that it would sound more modern. The great choral music associated with the Catholic church—Renaissance polyphony, the Masses of Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Bruckner, and so on—once sounded modern and "contemporary" (at least in part) to the congregations that heard this music when it was new.

Roman Catholicism has a long history of "modernizing" its liturgical music, for the purpose of better communicating with the congregation. But this "modernizing" (even when grossly inappropriate) used to mean borrowing music from the secular world and transforming it. The borrowed material, like the human race through the Incarnation, was somehow dignified, elevated, and raised to a higher level. Today, many of the fervent promoters of "contemporary Christian music" are not interested in being transformed by the church; their operating theory is that the church will come to their music and be transformed.

Is "classical" music so out-of-date and unpopular that Catholic congregations can no longer comprehend what it tries to communicate? Once again, the answer is complex. The very finest musical traditions of Christianity—magnificently presented—come across as an empty, pretentious bore if they seem to be imposed from above by people who "know better." But those musical traditions are symbols of a thriving faith when they are "owned" by the whole community. Two examples of this are to be found at Saint Agnes Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and Saint Paul Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At Saint Agnes, an orchestra sometimes accompanies the choir at Mass; the choir sings chant, Renaissance Masses, and Mozart. (The parish also has many vocations to the priesthood, with thirteen First Masses in the past twelve years.) At Saint Paul's in Cambridge, the boys' choir, the adult choir, and the extensive use of an old, "classical" repertory, for some odd reason, always give the impression of being boldly modern but not "high church." In both parishes, support for the music cuts across divisions of race, economic level, education, and age.

Generalizations are not easy to make. There are many parishes where "classical" music receives solid support from the community, but others where a tired, moribund, traditional repertory seems mummified. A parish with a militantly "antichurchy" faction in control might be doing quite well, while another parish, with virtually the same repertory, might turn worship into the liturgical equivalent of a train wreck. By itself, a certain type of music will not magically produce "success" and liturgical heaven on earth.

What do they want? cannot be answered by looking at "classical" *versus* "contemporary" or conservative *versus* liberal. To find out what is really going on, we have to examine a relatively new feature of Catholic worship, one that controls everything but is usually ignored. Two anecdotes:

A television interview. A Catholic priest explains that the church is fooling itself by keeping its liturgical and musical traditions. Those antiques are not what Jesus Christ really wanted, the priest insists. Scrap the whole thing. Then the scene changes. We see the same priest, dressed in a gold chasuble and wielding a portable microphone, racing up and down the center aisle of a church, waving his arms wildly and screaming, "God! God!" He is a white man and he is exhorting his largely black congregation to greater outbursts of religious frenzy. Evidently, this is what true worship is all about: a man dressed in gold who is the one and only star attraction of his own show; around him is a supporting cast.

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The second anecdote takes us to a rural parish. The community spirit is wonderful in this place. Every year, the organist rehearses the children's choir for the Confirmation Mass. Sometimes a group of brass instrumentalists volunteers to accompany the hymns. The music is plain (a missalette version of "classical"). About a week before Confirmation, the organist receives a call from the new director of the religious education program. Stop the rehearsals: the choir, organ, and brass instrumentalists will not be needed. "But how will we support the singing?" the organist asks.

"Oh, I have my guitar!" answers the director proudly.

And indeed, she did. The Confirmation Mass looked like a solo recital by the education director, who was interrupted occasionally by prayers. The congregation barely made a sound.

These two little dramas are extreme examples, but they represent thousands of less extreme stories and reveal a significant development in liturgical practice since Vatican II: the emergence of liturgical stars. You can go to a Catholic liturgy today and, one hour later, forget the prayers, readings, homily, and the songs, but the personality of the liturgical star—the priest or the solo musician up front—will be riveted in your mind for hours, maybe for years.

Imagine balancing scales. On the left side, put all kinds of postconciliar liturgical developments: the vernacular, new songs, new awareness of the congregation's role, etc. On the right side, put the priest and the solo musician. It would be like putting a pebble on the left side and a brick on the right. There is no comparison. In many churches and chapels, everything—from the architecture to the amplification system—has been arranged so that the priest and soloist will monopolize your attention, utterly and totally.

The Catholic church foresaw the dangers of liturgical monopoly centuries ago. To create a sense of common purpose, the church devised ways to submerge the priest's personality during worship. One of the most effective ways was with "classical" music. Those chanted dialogues between priest and people, a fine old hymn sung by everybody as equals, perhaps a Gregorian chant sung at Communion—all of that produced what someone has called a "leveling-out process," a symbol of people putting their individuality aside and, with collective humility, expressing joy for being a part of something so immensely important.

But not today. We live in a society that places enormous importance on the individuality of the entertainment star, not on humble joy. More than a few Catholics believe—and I am not the first to observe this—that the priest really should behave like a star at Mass. They search for that ideal priest whose magnetic "liturgical personality" will entertain and captivate them, and they search for that new music which will speak personally to them and release their internal energies. They are convinced that, once you get rid of "classical" liturgical music (which has a tendency to take glory away from the star) and replace it with "contemporary" songs, the result will be a surge of spiritual renewal, a Catholic Great Awakening. The churches will rock, there will be spiritual rolling in the aisles, and everybody will be a star. And the catalyst for all this released energy will be the priest and the vocal soloist.

In many churches and chapels, everything—from the architecture to the amplification system—has been arranged so that the priest and soloist will monopolize your attention, utterly and totally.

In July 1995, I attended the national convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians. About 3,500 people registered. The convention was so large that sometimes more than twenty-five different "sessions" on a huge variety of topics were going on at the same time. The "classical," "contemporary," multicultural, and charismatic were all represented in abundance. There was a Mass beautifully sung, with great fervor, in Gregorian chant; there were sessions on African-American, Caribbean, and Hispanic music for the liturgy. If the convention proved anything it is that nobody can say definitively "what Catholics want today" in liturgical music. A thousand flowers are blooming, among a million weeds. (And the most invasive weed, everywhere, is that sound of a domineering soloist behind a microphone.)

A few years ago I happened to attend Mass in a parish church that was having financial difficulties, although you would never guess it from the music. Plain, direct, confident, and based mostly on the better selections in a missalette, the congregational singing sounded "like a million dollars." Alas, a new (and rather conservative) pastor arrived afterward. All this "classical" music is not what Catholics want today, he declared; within a few weeks the organist—who had practically donated his services—was gone. In came the "contemporary" hits: a very narrow, constantly repeated repertory of music such as "Here I Am, Lord," "Let There Be Peace on Earth," and "Eagle's Wings." When I returned to the church recently, I barely noticed the "hit" music, which got a rather limp reaction from the congregation. What did strike me was the way the weak music made it easy for the priest and the musician to monopolize our attention. We watched passively as the pastor welcomed, explained, joked, embellished the liturgical texts with ad-libs, and seemed to float around the sanctuary; we watched as the soloist did all of the singing for us.

Is this what Catholics want? Perhaps the question is unfair and sounds too much like something that would be asked in an advertising agency. Perhaps the more realistic question would be: *Is this all that many Catholics are allowed to know?* What a pity. □

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LITURGICAL RITES & WRONGS

The temptation to be relevant

Frederick C. Bauerschmidt

A while ago I attended two different celebrations of the Eucharist on succeeding Sundays. The experience led me to rethink some of the common wisdom about what needs to be done to "fix" the Roman rite. Though I occasionally read what liturgical experts write, I am myself by no means an expert—except for the expertise one acquires through participating in the liturgy, week in and week out. And I find the expertise I have acquired is increasingly at odds with the recommendations made by many professional liturgists and what I perceive to be their underlying attitudes of utilitarianism and accommodation to a bourgeois culture.

The two Masses I attended were not celebrated by regular parish communities. The first was in the chapel of a major East Coast Catholic university. The community which gathered was largely thirty-something, with a few students mixed in. The beautiful chapel was arranged to facilitate a communal celebration around the Lord's table. Various parts of the liturgy were relocated or omitted, according to what liturgical scholars tell us was done in the early church or what experts in ritual say clarifies the meaning of the eucharistic celebration. Before Mass we were instructed how to change the words of one of the songs so as not to refer to God as "he."

By chance, or the providence of a God with a fine sense of irony, the next week I was at a small Trappist monastery in the deep South. The community at this Mass was largely sixty- or seventy-something. As the monks were in the process of rebuilding their church, they were worshiping in a double-wide trailer lit by fluorescent lights. As near as I can tell, the Mass was celebrated by the book, with nothing omitted, moved, or changed. This meant that God was not only called "he" but we proclaimed that Christ became incarnate "for us men and for our salvation."

My experiences of these two liturgies were strikingly different. At the Mass celebrated in the university chapel much effort had been put into the design of the liturgy. As proclaimed in its mission statement (printed on the back of the service leaflet), the community that gathered for this Mass saw as part of its mission being a model of liturgical celebration. The Gloria and the Creed were omitted and the penitential rite and sign of peace were moved to a place after the prayers of the faithful. The music had all been written in the last fifteen years and the copyrights, which had been dutifully acquired, indicated the usual big names in contemporary liturgical music. The homily was relevant, making reference to a recent movie (though not much mention of Jesus). All in all, I felt that a determined effort was being made to reach me "where I was at," to celebrate the liturgy in such a way that it would be intelligible to a typical, late twentieth-century North American. The liturgy had been "inculturated" so as to move me.

Yet I felt strongly unmoved. And, judging from the looks of boredom on their faces, so did many of the undergraduates around me. I found myself irritated by the rearrangement of the parts of the Mass. It was as if someone had moved the furniture in my living room without my permission. The homily summarized a movie I had already seen and told me a story that I didn't need to gather with the Christian community to hear. Of course as a Catholic I have grown used to vapid homilies (though my own pastor preaches quite well), but in this liturgy I was not even given the chance to answer back by reciting the Creed. Some of the music was fine (even if it tended to the "lite-rock" end of the dial), but there was a certain monotony of tone to the words: God was our friend and companion in the struggle to build the reign of God on earth. Nothing moved me because nothing challenged the

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assumptions of the world in which I live. My strongest emotion was my irritation at omissions and rearrangements.

The Trappists did not seem at all interested in "reaching me." They were hospitable enough (Benedict's Rule requires hospitality), making sure that I had copies of the music and had a place to sit. But this liturgy was totally unconcerned with my "experience" of it, totally unconcerned with moving me. Nor was it designed for the monks. It was designed for God—to remember what God has done for us and to offer the Eucharist for the life of the world.

And yet it moved me. It was the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the monastery's founding, so the procession before Mass formed in the graveyard. This was done, I was told, to bring "the whole community" into the celebration. There was no sermon at the Mass, but the prior offered a few opening remarks. He did not try to "connect" with my everyday life. What he said was that the souls of these dead monks, whose bodies lie buried in that graveyard, are now enjoying life with God and so are "more alive than we are." It was as if someone had violently woken me from a deep slumber. I thought, "he really believes this." I was shaken as I realized that what we call "life" is but a pale shadow of the life enjoyed by the saints in glory. His words moved me because they challenged all my modern liberal assumptions about the point of Christianity. They pulled me out of my usual world and dropped me down in a strange new one where the dead are "more alive than we are" simply because God is real.

I do not wish to idealize this monastery. The liturgy itself was hardly Solesmes. The musical setting for the Mass was a first effort by a guitarist who was a friend of the monastery, and it sounded like a first effort. But the liturgy was sung with as much gusto as the rather elderly congregation could muster, largely, I think, because the sung parts had been written especially for them as an act of devotion. During the eucharistic prayer, one of the concelebrants seemed interested primarily in picking some foreign object out of his long beard. But I was inclined to forgive him since I figured it was a sign of how comfortable he felt worshiping God.

These two Masses prompted me to wonder why they had affected me so differently, and to think about the need for revitalizing the liturgy. What underlies some of the specific changes which are routinely made by "progressive" liturgies? I would like to look at two specific recommendations routinely trotted out to "fix" the liturgy.

First, that *the entrance rite of the Mass is overloaded and needs to be simplified.* The elements which make up the introduction to the Mass have conflicting themes and get the liturgy off to a slow start. It is true that the themes of the entrance song, the penitential rite, the opening prayer, and the Gloria when mandated, are different from one another. But that very fact helps express some of the thematic complexity of the Christian life. Perhaps an essential first step in entering into the worship of God is having to wrestle with the conflict of wanting to praise the God who has called us while at the same time we recognize that we are yet sinners. Perhaps the entrance rite is no more complex than it needs to be to embody the reality of what it means to gather as the *corpus mixtum* of saints and sinners. And perhaps the desire to simplify it reflects our persistent human tendency to avoid complexity, not only in our liturgies but in our lives.

It is also true that the entrance rite is "slow" in the sense that it takes some time to play out its complex themes. But such time is necessary to prepare us to hear and to respond to God's word. The entrance rite helps us recognize that the church is not the world and that it is important to take time as we gather to realize that. I admit that such a statement smacks of what Matthew Fox has called the false dichotomy of "fall-redemption" spirituality. But it is a mistake to confuse God's good creation with the world we have made through our rebellion against God. Particularly given the predilection Americans have toward feel-good religiosity, we need a "slow" entrance rite to avoid falling into such a mistake. The entrance rite must prepare us for God's word, its prophetic as well as its affirmative character. To be ready to hear that word, we must first be mentally recollected and even physically engaged.

A second assumption of some liturgists that needs serious questioning is that *the Creed is a late addition to the liturgy and should be removed.* It is true that the recitation of the Creed was added to the Mass at a relatively late date (near the end of the first millennium). However, being a late addition is not in itself an adequate reason for excluding something from the liturgy. Were that so, three of our four current eucharistic prayers would be in trouble. My sense is that such an objection to the Creed has to do with inserting a dogmatic statement into the liturgy, thus violating its doxological character. Further, since the eucharistic prayer itself is the great profession of faith, the Creed may seem redundant.

I would hazard that part of our dislike for reciting the Creed is our unease with dogma in general. The Creed seems like a drag on the uplifting character of the Eucharist, a heresy test administered in the middle of a party. But the term "orthodoxy" means not only "right opinion" but "right worship." If our worship is to be doxological it must be rooted in the credal belief of the church. This is not to imply that the Creed restricts God by pinning down holy mystery to some humanly understandable and historically conditioned formula. But as Nicholas Lash has remarked about the doctrine of the Trinity articulated in the Creed, it is a "protocol against idolatry" intended to safeguard the mystery of God. If we understand the Creed in this way (and singing it occasionally might help in this), it is no less doxological than any other part of the Mass. And should we consider it repetitive, that is not in itself a vice. We need a certain amount of repetition to have rhythm. The story of our salvation proclaimed in different ways in the liturgy has a pedagogical intent: to reinforce its centrality in our lives.

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As I have indicated, the primary purpose of the liturgy is not functional. Still, if we stop reciting the Creed, I believe that within a generation 90 percent of Catholics would not know it, and that would be a critical loss.

Underlying both of these questionable, if fashionable, liturgical *dicta*, however, is another presupposition which bears scrutiny: the frequently intoned piety that liturgy must be "inculturated." This idea is rooted in Vatican II's very reasonable recognition that the unity of the Roman rite allows for variations in its rituals and texts which "respect and foster the qualities and talents of various nations" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 37). This provision was originally formulated with mission countries in mind. However, the demand for inculturation has gradually been extended to include any culture, even our own. To deny the primacy of "inculturation" is to relegate oneself to the backwater of liturgical theology; it is to be "sectarian" and "against culture" (terms borrowed from the Protestant theologians Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr).

But what is missing here is the recognition that Christianity is itself a culture: an ensemble of beliefs, traditions, and practices which form a more or less coherent matrix by which we understand the world. When it comes to liturgy, beliefs and practices which are not "indissolubly bound up with superstition and error" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 37) can be woven into the matrix, which is Christianity. Such inculturation is not only desirable but inevitable, and has always been one of the means by which Christian thought and practice, particularly liturgical practice, have developed. There are even aspects of American culture which might be fruitfully incorporated into our Christian practice. For example, given the demise of "man" and "he" as generic terms in American speech, it seems only right that liturgical texts should be translated to reflect this reality. However, the critical criterion must remain the Christian belief that in Christ there is neither male nor female, rather than such American notions as fairness or equality.

Finally, I must dissent from an attitude toward liturgy which I myself keep falling into. I mean that tempting mindset which says that all that is necessary to worship God in spirit and in truth is the proper liturgical nostrum—an achievable formulation that balances and coordinates this and that element. If only we would move the penitential rite and the sign of peace, then we could have "good liturgy." If only we would obey all the rubrics, then we could be pleased with our worship. If only we would restore Gregorian chant or ban choir solos or sing songs with scriptural lyrics or tune those guitars, then we would be able to offer a truly joyful noise to God.

These are by no means indifferent matters; I would be willing to argue that tuned guitars are an objective good. But "good liturgy" does not depend ultimately on any specific liturgical prescription. It depends on Christ's promise to be in our midst when two or three are gathered in his name. It depends on an assembly's thirst for righteousness and its desire for the holiness of God's kingdom. Finally, it depends on forms which resist any accommodation to cultural forces which would militate against that. Such liturgy might move us from being no people to being God's people.

The final liturgical wrong turn would be to believe that one specific form, in and of itself, is the "right" one. The "right" liturgy may be celebrated on a college campus or in a monastery in the deep South. It may be a grand assembly of thousands on a solemn feast or weekday Mass without either music or homily, over in a quick twenty minutes. It may be celebrated in a great cathedral or around a coffee table, the presiding priest facing the people or turning away, in Latin, Swahili, or English. The liturgy has been celebrated in all these ways. In all, God is capable of moving us as a pilgrim church toward the kingdom. And only that is good liturgy. □

Mary Winters

Presentation Counts

Chairs are for weaklings.
This is a country
Where we sit on the floor.

A bed is for dying;
Keep your body upright.
Even if it's armor

Holding you up,
The latch flipped
Locking the knees.

Breastplate stops you
Pitching forward.
You ordered the suit

Too large. More imposing.
In case you prospered,
Got fat. (Unlikely

In the famine.)
Presentation counts.
Your burro in chain mail

As big as a horse.
Drapery hiding
Its spindly legs.

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Praying & singing the new psalter

Ralph Thibodeau

The new psalter, mandated by the bishops of eleven English-speaking conferences, and written by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), is finished.

There are some shockers among the verses: "We finished you off" (Ps. 35, v. 25). "Stop tormenting me!" (addressed to God, 39:11). "Too bad for you!" (40:16). "Defend me from liars and thugs" (43: 1). "We drink them by the barrel" (80:6). "Lurching and reeling like drunks" (107:37).

Admittedly, these are in keeping with the commission's aim, stated in an afterword, "to render into idiomatic English the best critical Hebrew and Greek texts available." But some of this work seems almost Runyonesque.

However, the goal of idiomatic English is achieved, and has the virtue of making comprehensible many odd old expressions in the traditional Rheims-Douai and King James Bibles, a virtue, it should be noted, already found in the French and English Jerusalem Bibles, the New American Bible, the Revised Standard Version, and the Grail translation of the Psalms.

Rome has already objected to several changes in the new Sacramentary. Will the gender-neutral language of the Psalter call down more ukases? With very few exceptions, the Psalter deletes all masculine pronouns—*he, him, his*—and nouns—*man, men, sons, brothers, brethren, forefather*—in favor of *I, you, we, they, whoever, human,* and *humankind*. For example, Ps. 1 begins, in the Rheims-Douai: "Blessed is the man...." Now it reads, "If you would be happy...." And so it goes, almost universally, except for obviously historical kings et al. God is never he or him, but just God, repeated almost endlessly. Of course, in God there is no gender, as Thomas Aquinas tells us, but we have become so accustomed, Christian and Jew alike, by centuries of usage, to thinking of God as Father, that it will take some time for men—and for some women, too—to get used to the new terminology. We will certainly make the effort, in fairness to the half of the people of God who are female. *The Psalter* is an important step in the right direction.

Books discussed in these essays

The Psalter
International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)
Liturgy Training Publications, $18; paper, $12.

Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer
Liturgy Training Publications, $19, 269 pp.

The idiomatic language sought by the translators includes "use of contemporary poetic style." Besides the howlers quoted above, there are other verses which do not seem especially poetic. For example: "Don't let them gloat" (38:17). "God speaks, earth melts" (46:7). Both consist of four strong syllables in a row. This may be contemporary, but is it poetry?

Also, there is a deliberate attempt throughout to reduce the psalms to as few words as possible, and to use Anglo-Saxon monosyllables rather than Latinate polysyllables. For instance, Ps. 51 (50 in the Rheims-Douai) begins: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy./And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity." In *The Psalter*, this reads: "Have mercy, tender God,/ Forget that I defied you./ Wash away my sin,/ Cleanse me from my guilt."

That's eighteen words, compared to thirty-seven in the Rheims-Douai, thirty-four in both the King James and the Greek Septuagint, and twenty-seven in the Latin Vulgate. Even if we ignore the doggerel, isn't this simply dumbing down the Scriptures?

Another stated aim of ICEL is to

(Continued on page 18)

God is not an It

John C. Cort

The neuterization of God seems to be well under way. You can hear priests on the altar referring to God as "he or she." The practice of substituting "God" or "God's" whenever the masculine pronouns occur is even more common. Some priests follow it in the liturgy of the Mass, and now it has blossomed into full flower in a new translation of the psalms by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. I quote from *Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer*, a study translation prepared by ICEL.

Actually, the flower is not quite full. Contributing an introduction for the commission, Sister Mary Collins, O.S.B., concludes as follows:

> Still, it must be acknowledged that the final text of this psalter is a skin only three-quarters full of new wine. Once the project had been completed, ICEL forwarded the psalter to the Catholic Bishops'

(Continued on page 18)

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Thibodeau *(Continued from page 17)*

provide what is called a "dynamic equivalence," as opposed to a "formal equivalence" translation; by which I assume is meant that one makes clear the import, rather than the letter of the original. In this the translators have succeeded: the meaning of any given passage is usually quite clear.

Finally, the commission aimed "to be guided by the liturgical use of the psalms and canticles, and be fitting for musical setting." If by that is meant spoken recitation, then liturgical use can easily be made of this translation. But as for musical setting, I think the new psalms lend themselves to only very elementary chanting in traditional or modern psalmody. (This judgment seems confirmed by the also just-published *Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer*, with their simple modern psalmody.) I fear that the commission's overwhelming use of monosyllables makes them unfit for any serious musical setting, that is, a setting involving sophisticated melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic patterns, imitation and counterpoint, and above all, imaginative musical development.

I sincerely hope that some composer(s) will prove me wrong: yet I have to wonder what Brahms would have made of "Your temple is my joy / Lord of heaven's might," instead of Luther's "*Wie lieb sind mir deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaoth*—How lovely is thy dwelling-place, O Lord of hosts"—at the heart of his great German *Requiem*. □

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Cort *(Continued from page 17)*

> Committee on Doctrine for the *imprimatur*, which that body gives for biblical translations being published in the United States. The Committee on Doctrine reported back that it had decided earlier "in principle" that it would not give the *imprimatur* to any publication, however successful, that had avoided calling God "he." The principle at issue, presumably theological but perhaps more mundane, was not elaborated. Anti-climactically, the translators returned to undo some of their original work.

The task of undoing some of their original work could not have been arduous. The translators restored, by this writer's count, exactly 6 masculine pronouns while leaving intact 703 deletions of masculine pronouns. Collins protests that the commission's "skin is only three-quarters full of new wine." Her arithmetic seems imprecise. Six is not one-quarter of 709: It is less than 1 percent. The wineskin is actually 99.16 percent full of new wine.

In spite of this imbalance, Cardinal William Keeler, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, did grant an *imprimatur* to the new translation. Does he realize how little new wine the bishops were able to remove from the old wineskin.

I will not focus on the literary quality of the translation, which seems of high caliber, but rather on the issue that the bishops' committee raised, namely, the removal of God's masculinity. The translators confess that this removal is entirely their responsibility and not a question of a more faithful translation from a language whose pronouns are gender-neutral. Collins: "...[I]f the Hebrew employs language conventions like the exclusive use of masculine pronouns, the translators became responsible for appropriate critical handling of texts in this dynamic equivalence translation for contemporary prayer." Perhaps a translation of the translators is also appropriate, namely, "Even though the original Hebrew uses masculine pronouns when referring to God, the translators felt free to delete them in the interests of gender-free language."

The fight for inclusive language in the church is, by any rational standard, a just war. When Margaret O'Brien Steinfels writes in the *New York Times Book Review* (May 14, 1995) that "many Catholics, men and women, saw the retranslation of the catechism and its generic use of 'man' for 'human' as a gratuitous insult," one can only applaud. Sometimes it does seem that logic and common sense, not to mention common justice, are in short supply at the Vatican.

Collins holds that the neutralization of God is part and parcel of this fight for inclusive language. That is a more dubious proposition. For if it is, then ICEL's major opponent, standing like Horatio at the bridge, is Jesus Christ himself. In the Old Testament there are only about twenty-five instances where God is referred to as "father." In the four Gospels Jesus identifies God as "father" about 170 times, 109 of these in the Gospel of John alone. Even the Jesus Seminar, to my knowledge, hasn't maintained that Jesus never said it, though with the Jesus Seminar any absurdity is possible.

Then there is that immovable, massive rock, also blocking entrance to the bridge, the *Pater Noster*. How to get around that?

If we are Christians, we believe that the word of Jesus is the word of God. If the word of Jesus is the word of God, then we know that God wants to be addressed as father, wants to be prayed to as father, wants to be loved as father, wants to be obeyed as father, one of those old-fashioned fathers who spoke as one having authority. So, if God is recognized as father, how does it follow that he is not entitled to a masculine pronoun? Can we acknowledge him as masculine in the Gospels, but only a neuter in the psalms?

And how do you reconcile the personal God of the Old and New Testaments with a neuter God? In the real world, excluding hermaphrodite rarities, there are only two sexes, male and female. Those who have inventive minds can perhaps imagine a personality who is neither male nor female. But the product is imaginary, not based on normal human experience, not real. The only realistic members of this anti-male movement are the worshipers of Gaea, the earth goddess, God the mother.

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We are speaking here of God's masculinity as a metaphor, not a physical description. No need to remind us again that God has no genitals. God is a spirit. But on Jesus' authority he is a spirit who is predominantly masculine in nature. He has all the best feminine qualities as well, true, but the personality remains predominantly masculine. There is no other logical conclusion from the facts of biblical revelation. It may be a painful conclusion for the more militant feminists in the church, but it is inescapable.

In speaking of the bishops' refusal "on principle" to surrender God's masculinity, Collins notes: "The principle at issue, presumably theological, but perhaps more mundane, was not elaborated." Ignoring the needle that Collins gives the bishops in her "perhaps more mundane," let an untrained layman hazard some elaboration in the area where he is more at home, namely, the "more mundane" in the literal sense, "bound to earth, worldly."

Theologically, the issue, as noted, seems clear: Jesus has spoken; case closed. But why did he speak so clearly, so repeatedly, so emphatically? That case is wide open, and the bishops should really bite the bullet and address it. In her last paragraph, Collins expresses the hope that this new translation will lead to "service of the poor in search for justice." The word "justice" gives us a clue. Another clue may be found in the theme that runs throughout both Old and New Testaments: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Fear in moderation is a very healthy, useful emotion. We do, and refrain from doing, a lot of things out of a normal residue of fear. Whenever we take the wheel of a car, it is good old fear that keeps us from killing ourselves or landing in police court.

Women are better at love and compassion and mercy, which are also essential qualities of God. Men are better at law enforcement, the enforcement of justice, without which there can be no love, either in the home or in the world-at-large. Despite their inferiority to women in many ways, men are usually recognized as superior in physical strength, in size (usually), in depth and volume of voice (usually). "Wait until your father comes home" is not just an outmoded passing of a mother's buck. It is founded on human reality. It is better to be loved than feared, and any normal parent knows that, but children and human nature being what they are, both love and fear will continue to be necessary in a well-ordered, peaceful household, as well as in a well-ordered, peaceful world.

Why are the children and the teens running wild and killing off each other with guns and drugs in the ghettoes and in the affluent suburbs as well? No fathers. That's on good reason. No fear of God or man or woman.

We are the children of God. Our relation to him is not really different from the relation of children to their parents in general and to their fathers in particular. This may just possibly be one of the considerations that moved the Hebrew prophets and psalmists, that moved Jesus and the Catholic church, that has now moved the American bishops to insist on the masculinity of God.

By a score of 703-to-6 the International Commission on English in the Liturgy would seem to have won the first round. And nothing today is more politically incorrect, or perilous, than to question anything that is proposed in the name of inclusive fairness to women. Nevertheless, it would be premature to count the bishops out. They have a powerful champion.

Meanwhile, leaving God in his heaven, perhaps we can unite with enthusiasm on the more limited, exact objective of securing inclusive language here below, in the Mass, in the psalms, wherever. But the bishops are right to insist that God remains in *his*, not *its*, heaven. □

John C. Cort, *father of ten, recently completed a new book on justice and the real right to work.*

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Richard Alleva

'A' IS FOR APPALLING

'The Scarlet Letter' & 'To Die For'

Freely "adapted from the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne" states—warns—one of the opening credits of Roland Joffe's *The Scarlet Letter*.

So we should judge the movie on its own merit, right? Okay, here goes.

Judged strictly on its own merits, *The Scarlet Letter* may be the worst American movie of the year. I don't pretend to have seen every American film this year, but I can testify that this glib atrocity is crasser than *Showgirls* (though not so salacious), drippier than *The Bridges of Madison County* (though not as sincere), smugger in its political correctness than *Pocahontas* (though lacking cute, furry animals), more inept in its storytelling than *Batman Forever* (but without *Batman*'s excuse of having no real story to tell).

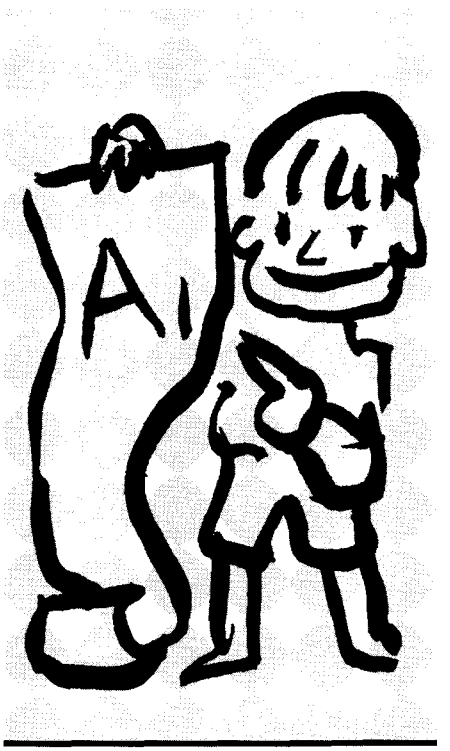
You can walk in on this movie at any moment of its running time and witness gross stupidity. Examples: The film is narrated by Hester Prynne's little love child, Pearl. Why? Pearl hasn't even been born in the first half of the movie, and during its second she is too young to understand what's going on around her. What is her narration supposed to do? Explain loose ends in the plot? It doesn't. Illuminate motivation? It doesn't. A transitional device to let us know that several years pass between the two halves of the story? But Pearl's very presence accomplishes that without narration: if she's a baby midway through and a seven-year-old at its conclusion, can't the audience figure out how many years have passed?

Let Hester merely go to market and what does John Barry's music do but swell up into a crescendo full of echoes of Aaron Copland, Elmer Bernstein, John Williams, and every other film composer ever hired to make us think of rolling plains, cascading waterfalls, awe-inspiring canyons, and America the Beautiful.

Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale gallops over to Hester (this is the Meet Cute scene), struggling to extricate her carriage from mud, and asks, "Can I help you?", and what does she reply? "Not from up there [that is, on his horse] you can't" *Excuse* me? This one line transforms Hester Prynne from the embodiment of natural decency and instinctive courtesy into a wisecracking cutie from "Melrose Place."

Sample dialogue by Douglas Day Stewart: Dimmesdale (admiring the wilderness setting of Hester's house): "It's beautiful." Hester: "Yes. Just as Eden must have been. (Pause) Still untouched." I love the last two words. So helpful for those of us who don't know what Eden represents.

Demi Moore, chin up and eyes shining, comes on like the cosseted darling of a prep school's drama department. The harder she struggles with her British accent, the higher her eyebrows arch. The remarkable Robert Duval, in the great role of Roger Chillingsworth, alternates between sleepwalking and spasm but never gets a chance to define a human being. The talented chameleon Gary Oldman, as Dimmesdale, looks at ease in period garb and is well-spoken but delivers flurries of emotion so superficially that nothing in his performance abides in the memory. Edward Harwick (Dr. Watson to the late Jeremy Brett's Sherlock Holmes on PBS) makes the Puritan governor a recognizable human being, but the rest of the supporting cast is spurious, with even the great Joan Plowright reduced to dimpling and twinkling.



The only value this movie has is in the way it perfectly demonstrates state-of-the-art cinematic banality. Director Joffe knows the drill and sticks to it. For the dialogue scenes, choose a pretty location, place your actors, get them reciting. Then shoot each talking head from over the shoulder of the listener, just before he or she replies. Repeat *ad infinitum*. Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, z-z-z-z. Of course, this time-moldered formula wouldn't exasperate if the dialogue were good, but I've already given an example of that. As for the action sequences, they are equally formulaic.

So much for the movie on its own terms. As to what it signifies as an adaptation of a great American classic, I'm no Hawthorne expert, but isn't it pretty clear where the power of this novel comes from? Within the author's nature struggled two antagonistic world views: the absolute morality of his Puritan forefathers and the liberal, forgiving ethic of a nineteenth-century humanist. It's this psychological and moral tug-of-war that produces the true drama of *The Scarlet Letter*. As Curtis Harnack has observed, "In *The Scarlet Letter*, guilt and sin allied with moral values that transcend the milieu described." Hester and Arthur sin by their adultery; Dimmesdale further sins in his hypocrisy; and the cuckolded husband, Prynne/Chillingsworth, sins most of all in his vindictiveness. But Hester truly loves Arthur, and her for-

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bidden passion breeds compassion, sensual warmth, courage, fortitude, maternality, honor. Broken by his guilt, Arthur will at last arrive at self-knowledge and honesty. And—strangest character of all—Chillingsworth becomes a veritable philosopher of the malign, a Puritan version of Goethe's Mephisto.

But who populates the movie version? A slick-chick Hester with an aerobically sculpted body, a worker-priest Dimmesdale whose main obsession is to translate the Bible into Algonquin, and a Chillingsworth who is closer to Hannibal Lecter than Mephisto. Instead of the complex interaction of sin and virtue, we get flippant self-exculpation ("Who is to say what is a sin in God's eyes?"). Instead of Hawthorne's great climax with the minister revealing his own scarlet letter carved by guilt on his flesh, an Indian raid caps the movie and the lovers are allowed to ride off happily into the sunrise. For how can sin and virtue interact when, according to the ethics of La-La Land, virtue means feeling good, and the only sin imaginable is not doing your own thing?

This new *Scarlet Letter* is the latest revenge of the present upon the past for not being the present.

Scriptwriter Buck Henry and director Gus Van Sant wouldn't mind pinning a scarlet letter on the heroine of their movie, *To Die For*, but this particular A would stand for Ambition. Suzanne Stone (Nicole Kidman) is a small-town girl who's determined to become a celebrity television journalist à la Jane Pauley and Connie Chung. When her good-hearted but rather dim husband (Matt Dillon) threatens to stand in her way, she seduces a teen-ager and gets him and his pals to murder her spouse. Rather than panicking when the police move in, she basks in the sudden visitation of celebrity. *To Die For* is, of course, a satire and, fortuitously, the first movie of the life-after-O.J.-era.

The scarlet letter that I would emblazon on the chests of the moviemakers is a big C for Cleverness, the self-preening and ultimately self-defeating sort. Everything in this movie, from the nifty opening credits to the ironic closing shot, bespeaks adroitness of design and pop-culture knowingness. And yet the net result is an impression of stupidity: the stupidity of the character and the story, and the fatuousness of filmmakers entranced by their own slyness.

Consider: our heroine, from childhood, has lusted to make a splash in the big-city media world. So why does she tie herself to a working-class, small-town boy? (Not for sex, for she's not particularly sensual, and not for money, for his family isn't particularly well-off.) She's obviously read a lot about how certain media celebrities had their careers ignited; so why does she pursue a dead-end job at a cable-TV company? Early in the movie, while crashing a media convention, she's told a salacious story by an executive who doesn't spell out the meaning of the punchline because any moderately bright fourteen-year-old would get it. But Suzanne doesn't. Since the heroine is so stupid, the teen-agers she turns into killers must be shown to be dumber than she is. In fact, they are portrayed as downright vegetable. And when Suzanne gets her comeuppance, it's precisely because of her (literally) incredible lack of mother wit.

All satire attacks the self-destructive stupidity of humankind, yet, if the main characters of the satire appear moronic, the thrust of the satire is canceled. Attacking the folly of war in *Monsieur Verdoux*, Chaplin was shrewd to make his mass murderer brilliant. Attacking nuclear war in *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick did indeed make the generals psychotic and silly, but their commander-in-chief, President Mandrake, was shown as moderately intelligent and well-meaning; more importantly, the nuclear arsenal itself was an awesome creation and its delivery system a work of technical wizardry. The human race can be satirically skewered only when the satirist shows that even its brightest members serve folly. By contrast, we can shrug off Suzanne's crimes as the work of a near-idiot.

To Die For does what no satire should do: it lets us off the hook. □

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Poems

Dixie Partridge

Early Memory

Salt River Range, Wyoming

The pale netting of farmhouse curtains
on my back—and outside
the white gauze of a blizzard,
wind like a gyre of undertow
in a deep white stream.

Mesmerized and wanting
what I could think of only as touch,
I stood at the window next to the hills,
straining to see the cottonwood
out there for climbing in summer.

A blue dusk came on
as my breath formed on the glass,
frost needles reaching from the edge,
the room darkening and the blizzard
growing paler.

Suddenly—something big
moved in the whiteness, like a frozen ledge
come alive: it went still
then moved off, cloaked in hoarfrost,
a shape arctic as iceberg, but I knew
it was steaming underneath,
thriving in the cold.

I sensed then, but couldn't
have said it—that I would remain lonely
while both savoring and fearing the physical
world, that *being* would mean aching beyond
the staunch arms of trees
toward the blood warmth of beasts,
and heartbeat...and loving it more
for the cold.

Pilgrimage

Somewhere in this city
is a river
you could find it
if you could reach the hills
and look down
or if you were a sparrow or
were watching from a plane

a plane is flying over now
through fumes
and you have to concentrate
very hard against
a traffic of sound
to know again
you can find the river
if you can see the old trees
winding its banks

most were cut down
but some still huddle
in the smog as the sun
swells up
they are where you must go
for their leaves
have lived on

once like a fine stained glass
their green breathed light
once like small hands opening
they came into being
accepting
and with your best sight
you will find them

there along the grey river
looking up to a transparency
of leaves you will know
the day is ancient as sunlight
the city is the mirage
in which you live

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Step-dancing on a high wire

An Altogether Different Language
Anne Porter
Zoland Books, $16.95, 116 pp.

Marie Ponsot

Anne Porter's *An Altogether Different Language* is a work of great refreshment.

American poetry flourishes in rich variety, as its parameters expand. Even so, this book is extraordinary, a rare flight.

For one thing, these are lyrics of praise for a world that is praiseworthy because it is created. Praise, especially grateful praise, is a mode dreadfully long out of fashion.

For another, Porter is a poet of faith. References, lexicon, scenes, and persons are refracted through a Catholic belief free of doubt or contention. It is not political or argued; not worldly, not naive. More, it is a working faith, from which Porter tries to realize daily consequences. And it is unmistakable. She builds in none of the usual defenses (obscurity, discontinuity, self-mockery, self-pity.) Her poems are floral and tuneful, responsible and unprotected. They debate nothing, and express no issue narrower than faith in love and its praise.

"I'll try," she says at Christmas, "to catch up with the shepherds." She tries, not to interrogate or subvert them, but to recall us to what the songs tell us they saw: "as the angels told us, He shines in a dark valley."

Again she tries, in conceiving her calling as poet in terms of the Pasture Rose, *rosa humilis*, "a small peasant rose...I try to learn/As if the Lord had told me/Listen to the rose/Be the voice of the rose."

Readers of *Commonweal* (where Anne Porter's poems have for a decade freshened the air and heightened the light) know already that these poems are unmatched. How she does it, how this most sophisticated person marshals her sophistication to order the apparently simple lines, can't be pinpointed.

David Shapiro's introduction to her book is, in its way, as unusually excellent as the poems. It is cogent, eloquent, true, and not to be missed. But even he falls short. A central lightness and freshness perdure, mysterious. It remains to read the poems, and see.

In phrasing and structure, many poems are, like prayers, addressed elsewhere, for us to overhear. In a perfectly realized elegy/eulogy, "For My Son Johnny," Porter prays to her dead child as to a heavenly intercessor. Self-described as "a man without money or power," he loved woods, fields, God; he was angry, tender, awkward, dear. Porter's tact in revealing his innocent life is absolute.

It's her daring that does it, as she risks what our generation cannot abide, sentimentality. She always escapes that, not by overriding irony, but by modesty that sustains her in reporting her emotional truth, as in the poignant ending:

Now you're with Mary, whose
starry veil you loved,
And of whom you said, "She won't
get bored with my puns,"
And "She won't mind if I touch her
dress."
While your mother, who sometimes did
get bored with your puns,
Cries here on earth

And asks you, now that you're one
of the greatest,
To grant her a portion of your littleness.

With this poem the book achieves its apex of intimacy. Elsewhere, Porter may use a shorthand of generalizations at times. (They are prayer-like or biblical, in that she is sure we can call concrete cases to mind when she says, "the wounded," "the old," "the poor.") In "For My Son, Johnny," however, all is unpacked, explicit, its concrete instances chosen by heart and by wit, to evoke a keen sense of a person the speaker loves.

The poem turns up other important themes, too: life after death, the natural world, the worth of littleness. Porter's work finds itself, I think, on the little way of Thérèse de Lisieux—a way of local, child-small, I–Thou acts and gestures, none easy, all unpretentious. The Thérèsian way joins the way of Saint Francis (and perhaps Saint Bonaventure's *Way of the Mind to God*, which cherishes a consciousness grounded in recognizing vestiges of the holy everywhere).

Landscapes and events shine in Porter's words for the real world. "A List of Praises" celebrates earth's music: "The skirling of seagulls," "the rasp and sizzle of crickets, katydids, and cicadas," peepers' "shimmer of bell-like cries." She has a gift for sketching a panorama, then focusing on a close view in lovely cadences of conclusion. "Autumn Crocus" zeroes in from a wide spectacle of fall to where "the earth/breathes out the unearthly blossoms/Of the autumn crocus/Around the tool-shed door."

In "Leavetaking" Porter adds, to the work of praise, her wise exploration of what it is to be old—a field where few of the discoveries peculiar to poetry have yet been made:

Nearing the start of that mysterious last season
Which brings us to the close of the other four,
I'm somewhat afraid and don't know how to prepare
So I will praise you.

To do so, she names crows, buttercups,

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her childhood, smashed glass, and blue chicory. Prayer of praise then shifts to petition: "I thank you for that secret praise/Which burns in every creature,/And I ask you to bring us to life/Out of every sort of death/And to teach us mercy."

The power implied in the fine title poem, "An Altogether Different Language," is angelic, not one Porter claims for herself. Her language is not angelically disembodied but human, and markedly hers. Its choices of inclusion and exclusion are moved by the received faith of Catholic spirituality. Bloy and Bernanos, Péguy and Claudel wrote from just such a foundation a generation or two ago. But Porter's understanding is fresh, American, womanly, and her own.

Her diction is Thérèsian, in a rather small middle range, with a ready music of assonance. What generates her wonderful tone is faithfulness to the terms and occasions of belief native to her.

It is an instantly recognizable pitch, refined by the framing and point of her view. Well modulated, it is the pitch of a dynamic and transfiguring equanimity. It may be our hearts are restless until they rest in this way.

Like the tunic of Saint Francis in the luminous "Song for the Town of Assisi," the poems are "Reproach and treasure." Treasures fill them: a tree, a bird, Long Island, Chartres, Easter, a kind neighbor, a brave servant. She discerns in them "that secret praise/Which burns in every creature." ("Reproach," for some of us, may lie in our failure—never hers!—to see in each creature the presence of praise.)

Part of the power of her work is that it looks easy, as when we watch someone walk confidently forward across the ground. Glance again, though, at Anne Porter crossing the stages of this world, and who knows? we may perceive she has achieved her notable equipoise while step-dancing on a tight wire, strung high outside the conventional demotic nets of her fellow poets. □

Marie Ponsot *lives in New York City. Her most recent book of poetry is* The Green Dark *(Knopf).*

SEZ WHO?

Reason in the Balance
The Case against Naturalism in Science, Law & Education
Phillip Johnson
InterVarsity Press, $19.95, 245 pp.

Terry Scambray

Like God in medieval theology, everything is known about evolution except whether it is true. Phillip Johnson, University of California professor of law, in his brilliant *Darwin on Trial* (InterVarsity) demonstrated that Darwin's theory rests more on the assumption of its truth than the rigor of its proofs. Yet Darwin's powerful creation story underwrites the ideology of modernism which assumes that science has, or soon will have, a natural explanation for everything.

In *Reason in the Balance*, Johnson splendidly argues that esteemed representatives of science, such as Stephen Hawking and Carl Sagan, while cloaking themselves in white-coated neutrality, often attempt to bully us into accepting a reductionist world view, neutered of all religious and ethical values.

Hawking, for example, has made an ambitious claim for a "final theory of everything," a speculative theory of a self-generating universe which would have no need for anything outside of itself, including a deist Prime Mover or an intervening Judaic-Christian God. But Johnson, logician and philosopher of science, wonders how such a theory would be tested? Suppose that the rules which explain the universe also explain or, indeed, limit the minds and the in-

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vestigations of the scientists themselves? How is one to factor for any self-referencing fallacy? Hawking, recognizing the conundrum, attempts an escape by placing his faith in Darwin's principle of natural selection. Since as a species we are survivors, Hawking believes, "...we might expect that the reasoning abilities that natural selection has given us would be valid in our search for a complete unified theory." But in this hope Hawking has only replaced faith in one man-made theory with faith in another. And as Johnson reminds us, "Once we try to explain the mind as a product of its own discoveries, we are in a hall of mirrors with no exit." Precisely the terrifying funhouse of modernity that Kafka et al. parody.

Cosmological speculation is one thing, its own genre more akin to myth; but when these speculations take on the *imprimatur* of science, they begin to tell a compelling story that has consequences. And the story, as usually recounted by influential advocates of scientific naturalism and their acolytes, is that life was a chance event, has no purpose and is a struggle for physical survival, devoid of higher purpose.

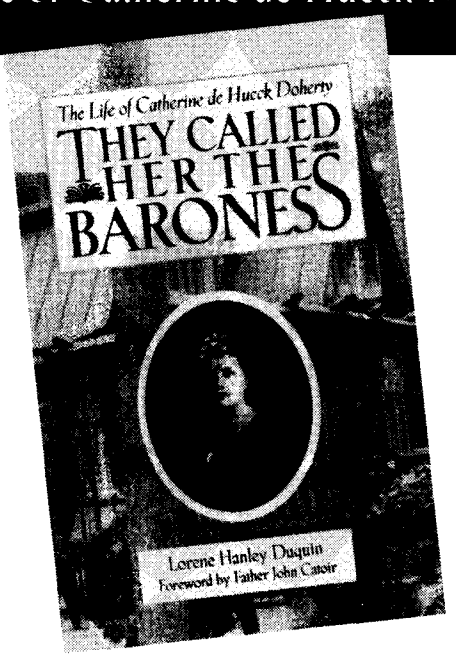
Echoing Dostoevski, Johnson asks, "If God does not exist, and if there is no Platonic metaphysical realm of divine essences, then there may be no absolute reference point from which to judge competing interpretations of reality." Johnson does seem to slight other philosophic positions besides those based on theism or Platonism; Kant, for example, stood on man's rationality as the ground for his arguments, admittedly a rationalism respectful of heritage and tradition. Nonetheless, for Johnson, the abandonment of an external reference point—and Darwin accelerated the defection—had a damaging effect on the intellectual framers of twentieth-century America.

Influenced by the prevailing Darwinism of the 1890s, Oliver Wendell Holmes, our most influential jurist, saw the law in a pragmatic way as a Hobbesian source of order in a world free of any restrictive moral code. The law, therefore, need not be a bearer of any cultural template, since citizens are independent agents in a predatory world. This ideological graft produced many of the fruits of our present legal system and its often unpredictable concepts of justice and legal procedure.

The late Yale law professor, Arthur Leff, called the response now offered to all assertions of authority, "The grand sez who?" Since there exists no independent moral order, "Who says I should bow to any convention or command?" Except, of course, to the force of the increasingly powerful state.

This radical sense of individual autonomy mitigates the idea of responsibilities and blankets everyone with immunity for his actions. Johnson surely scores here, for America's problems will not be solved by following the directives of the Right or Left, one promoting free-market anarchy, the other the anarchy of designer lifestyles, all paid for by the taxpayer in what Johnson calls a system of "libertarian socialism."

The Life of Catherine de Hueck Doherty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In addition to the investigation of historical figures like Holmes, this book offers a remarkable trip through topics like abortion, taxes, teleology, and particle physics, and the ideas of *cognoscenti* like Steven Weinberg, Francis Crick, and Richard Rorty. All of these issues and icons are measured by Johnson's logical and composed mind.

As a polemicist, Johnson has been subject to a variety of counterattacks, one group claiming that he is destroying the uneasy reconciliation forged between science and religion since the divisive Galileo incident in the seventeenth century. But Johnson recognizes that religion has only been invited back into the house of intellect because its place is merely decorative, thereby permitting important disciplines like science, especially physics and microbiology, to control the discussion by telling the world what is real. Johnson suggests that theology and philosophy not be intimidated into surrendering their pictures of reality.

Various books of late encourage more serious consideration of theology in public debate. Among the best are Richard Neuhaus's *The Naked Public Square* and more recently Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief*. But what distinguishes Johnson is his penetrating understanding of science and its limits. For that reason, he stands in the great tradition of Blake and Swift, companion skeptics of Enlightenment hype, who clearly saw the arriving butchery of their time as it was being validated by a doctrinaire science which marginalized traditional wisdom. A master of the plain style, Johnson incorporates both a feathery irony and a relentless fairness in his work, always confident enough to permit himself to be vulnerable. What more can be asked for? □

Terry Scambray *teaches English at Fresno State University in California.*

THE ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGION AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE
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A PREMATURE OBITUARY

The Death of Satan
How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil
Andrew Delbanco
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, $23, 258 pp.

Robert Worth

Satan is dead, and with him we have lost the belief in evil and sin that might serve as a moral anchor in our sprawling, postideological world. So goes the popular wisdom, and Andrew Delbanco offers it up as the lesson of American literary history in his new book, *The Death of Satan*. We are more surrounded by images of violence and horror than ever before, according to Delbanco, yet we have lost the ability to talk meaningfully about them. This is no small matter, because the idea of evil is "a metaphor upon which the health of society depends." Yet Delbanco never explains what he means by this, aside from a vague intimation that those who fail to understand evil will surely fall into it. His survey of American literature is eloquent, but his broader moral argument is fraught with confusion. He concludes that "We want Satan back because God depends on him," yet he claims to speak for the "party of secular liberalism." He fends off charges of nostalgia for religious certainties, yet he feels that we have suffered from their loss. The result is a kind of unintentional plea for casuistry: if we could learn to talk about evil, Delbanco implies, we might diminish it.

The recent history of Yugoslavia suggests that this is not so. But literary history is full of writers who have championed evil as a clarifying principle. Poets and preachers have always known that Satan's threat is the linchpin of God's grace. In our own century, Graham Greene appears to have embraced Catholicism precisely so as to dramatize the meaning of evil in his own life and work; and T.S. Eliot claimed that "damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation—of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living."

There is something decadent in these attitudes, which seem to render evil into mere spice for a theatrical appetite. And it should be said at once that Delbanco is innocent of any such jaded posturing. He claims to have no interest in jump-starting older religious attitudes, and he has little to say about the actual figure of Satan, despite his title. He offers instead a strictly moral history, in which Satan generally figures as a scapegoat. The colonists of early New England, for instance, who thought of themselves as "primitive" Christians in a renewed and purified world, had nonetheless to resign themselves to the realities of modern commerce in order to survive. "Their language was simply at odds with their circumstance," Delbanco writes, "and Satan was the name they gave to the contradiction."

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But even at Salem, Satan was doomed. Puritan New England was the last great flare-up of this visible devil. Thereafter he began to retreat into the concept of evil, which was itself chiefly manifested in two ways. First, an external sense of evil: someone else, whether Satan, the Jews, or a neighbor, is the focus of final blame. The second and far nobler sense of evil is internal, residing in our own failures of love or power, or in our very tendency to demonize others.

Delbanco, who started his career at Harvard as a student of Puritan New England, names Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards as the two early and paradigmatic moral voices of our literature. Franklin was the secularist and explainer, the transformer of "sin" into mere "erratum," whose scientific spirit has come to dominate the culture of the secular West. Edwards represents the voice of individual moral responsibility, insisting that good and evil are inescapable poles of human action. Behind Edwards stands Augustine, who recognized in the *Confessions* that the great source of evil was within the self, not beyond it in some hooved and horny nemesis. He pointed the way, Delbanco writes, to the "difficult literary problem of representing evil as a negation rather than as an entity."

This literary problem, Delbanco rightly observes, was an enormous one for the canonical American writers of the nineteenth century, who masked their own theologies in skepticism and transcendental sublimity. They had less trouble describing the habits of their fellow Americans, who were too often eager to demonize, oppress, enslave, and slaughter. In this landscape of horror and Civil War, Lincoln emerges as the heroic heir to Augustine and Edwards, a man who saw "a vision of a world drenched in sin, but free of targetable devils."

For the culture at large, the Civil War was "the great divide between a culture of faith and a culture of doubt." Thereafter the heroic struggles of Lincoln and Captain Ahab began to recede into the past, as the decrees of Providence began to look more and more like random events in a mechanistic universe. Evil was not so much a problem, for the realist writers of the postwar decades, as a precondition, an atmosphere of loss, in which all ideals seemed tarnished, all natural order broken.

The final chapters of this literary story Delbanco titles "The Age of Blame" and "The Culture of Irony." In the twentieth century the demographic growth of the country made Americans more likely than ever before to identify evil with some other ethnic or social group. And in our own time, with the end of the cold war and the continued erosion of tradition, evil is often taken for a kind of joke, a piece of leftover theological jargon to be kicked around by columnists and critics.

This narrative expresses a complaint popular among liberals about their own secular and cosmopolitan culture. Delbanco tells it well, but as a scholar he ought to be more sensitive to the ways in which our sense of evil has diversified, not disappeared. His subtitle is "How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil." But the early American colonists and the United States of today are the same country only by virtue of a myth preserved in textbooks. To say that "we" (in the present) have lost what "we" had 300 years ago makes little sense. If a wandering Jew had written a book on morals in 1700 and marketed it in Salem, Paris, Rome, Ispahan, and Delhi, he would surely have found distressing evidence that "we" lacked a common language for evil. The same thing is true today, except that it happens within the borders of the United States. Americans have not lost anything substantial. They have gained a hundred new ways to talk about evil—and good, for that matter—and they hear them on TV, on the radio, and in newspapers twenty-four hours a day. This cacophony may make for a certain reticence about morals among the more prominent public voices in our culture, but it does not mean that we are on the verge of falling into a vast and unperceived evil. □

Robert Worth *is a graduate student in English at Princeton University.*

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LORD OF THE REPUBLIC

The Last Great Frenchman
A Life of General De Gaulle
Charles Williams
Wiley & Sons, $30, 544 pp.

Steven Englund

On the author's telling, the greatness of Charles De Gaulle lies "in his single-minded devotion to his country, and in his skill and strength in its service." More particularly, Charles Williams—whose day job as Deputy Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition is not something *"le Général"* would have admired or even understood—is at pains to lay out De Gaulle's defense of his ideal of France during the war. To powerful effect, Williams cites the wife of a British general attached to the Free French by Churchill. Here is Mary Boren Spears's description of DeGaulle in July, 1940.

> I think he felt the dishonor of France as few man can feel anything, and that he had literally taken on himself the national dishonor, as Christ according to the Christian faith took on himself the sins of the world. I think he was like a man, during those days, who had been skinned alive, and that the slightest contact with friendly, well-meaning people got him on the raw to such an extent that he wanted to bite, as a dog that has been run over will bite any would-be friend who comes to its rescue.

This is all well and good but celebrating De Gaulle's "single-minded devotion to his country" is old hat. What makes Williams's book a fine study as well as a great read is that he is mindful of the ways in which De Gaulle proved his devotion—ways that "cost" him. The general once remarked that he should have chosen the royal Louvre as his official residence rather than the mundane Elysée Palace, traditional abode of the presidents of the Republic. "You don't make history from the [bourgeois] eighth *arrondissement*," he sighed, ruefully. A facetious remark from a man not known for humor. What is surely important is not where De Gaulle chose to live but how he chose to rule—and that was always *"en République."* The general may have emoted far more often for *"la France"* and *"la Nation"* than for *"la République,"* yet his greatness in French history will always be that despite a background and personal style which spurned the Revolution of 1789, Charles De Gaulle upheld the Republican ideal and played by its democratic rules (most of the time).

He did so at the Liberation (1944) when he might well have thrown his prestige into an attempt to set up an authoritarian regime that would bar the Communists from power. Later, foiled by the Left in his attempt to create a regime different from the late Third Republic, which he despised, De Gaulle freely, albeit with bitterness, relinquished power (1945) and let "the parties" have their way. True, in 1958, he played *éminence grise* in a successful *coup d'état* against the troubled Fourth Republic. The Socialists affect "never" to forgive De Gaulle that action, but their own imitative tenure in office under Mitterrand spoke louder than their angry words.

In short, the adjectives *"Gaulliste"* and *"Gaullienne"* may connote authority, hierarchy, and more than a little pomp and ostentation, but "monarchist" or "caesarian" or even "consular," they are not, and never were. This is no minor act of self-mastery for a man born into the general's Catholic and monarchist milieu in a country that has known as much fratricidal political bloodshed and as many violent changes of regime as France.

I, for one, had not thought the world needed another biography of De Gaulle now that Jean Lacouture's definitive one has been translated into English. But

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Charles Williams's book made me feel differently. A more readable, at times enthralling, single-volume take on De Gaulle you cannot hope to find. The author navigates a clear course through a thick marsh of secondary and primary sources. He is excellent on the easier questions—De Gaulle's self-perception; his early role as Pétain's protégé; his capacity to disobey orders; the aloof and determined nature of his leadership ("[De Gaulle] strutted 'as though he were moving his own statue'").

And he is by and large strong in addressing the hard ones. "Playing the 'Nation' card" is how Williams wonderfully describes the great Gaullist political ploy of cutting the all but indisseverable Nation-State pairing and turning *"la Nation"* against *"l'État."* For example, the famous June 17, 1940 speech from London wherein De Gaulle declared that the French state's surrender to the Nazis "would be crimes against the nation"; or again, in 1947, when he launched his Union of the French People (RPF): "when the vast mass of the French people, rejecting sterile games and refashioning the ill-constructed framework of the state within which the nation is now going astray, will rally around France herself." In short, "playing the 'nation' card" is a way of doing political work in the name of apolitical patriotism.

Accomplished at historical analysis, Williams's hand is also fine at the biographer's art. Having cited Mary Soames, Churchill's daughter-in-law, who told De Gaulle during the war, *"Mon Général,* you should be very careful not to hate your friends more than your enemies," Williams limns the evolution in De Gaulle's political personality toward a greater ability to deal in the politics of flattery and flexibility. He is adept at portraying the paradox between the personage and the person, contrasting "a very cold, ruthless, and proud public man" with De Gaulle's gentleness with his daughter, Anne, afflicted with Down's syndrome. (He would sit her in her place at the card table, deal her a hand, and gently play the cards for her.) Williams even speculates about the general's religious convictions, mentioning "...the streak of nihilism and pessimism in him which led at least one of his closest companions in later life to wonder whether he had any real faith at all. Nietzsche, with his contempt for Christianity, and Chateaubriand, its fervent champion, seemed to be in constant warfare in his mind."

This said, I find Williams weak on interpreting De Gaulle's relations with England and the United States. For example, the author sees only the brutality and irrationality of De Gaulle's anti-Americanism in the 1960s; he rarely if ever considers that such actions as pulling out of NATO might have held an underlying sense for a medium-sized power like France—as no less an analyst than Henry Kissinger was well aware of.

It's also time we stopped rehearsing conventional wisdom when it is plainly contains contradictions. "Favoring the *fleur-de-lys,"* as monarchists like De Gaulle's parents did, generally did *not* entail favoring war for "the instant recovery of Alsace-Lorraine," as Williams asserts, nor did being "deeply, perhaps neurotically, Catholic [and] a fervent monarchist" carry

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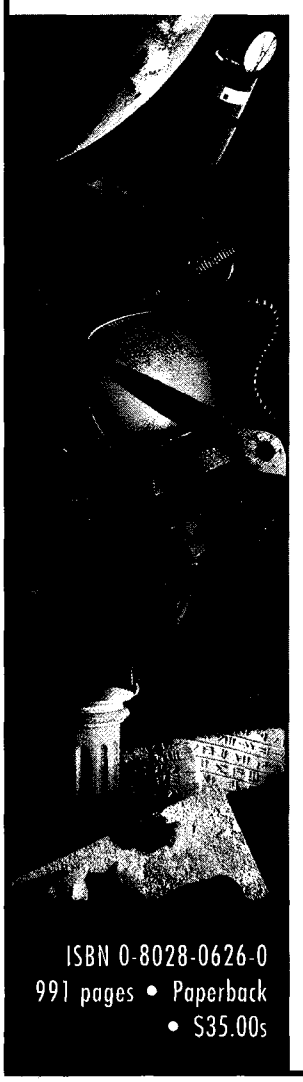

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with it the necessity of being "intensely patriotic," as he also states. In the early Third Republic, *revanche* and patriotism were by and large the political hallmarks of Republicans, not monarchists, and as for Catholics, their patriotism was of necessity mediated and moderated by their religion. Williams himself notes that Henri De Gaulle was so angry at the anticlerical regime in France that he sent Charles to Belgium to finish his studies at a Jesuit college there. "Rome was stronger than Paris," writes the author.

Finally, I agree that Joan of Arc is overworked as an analogy for De Gaulle—she was, after all, as Williams says, no rebel but a fighter for constituted authority against foreign invaders. On the other hand, to go on to compare De Gaulle to...Maximilien Robespierre!?, as the author does, calling him "a Jacobin rebel to boot" is to void the revolutionary and his party of most of their actual historical significance. □

Steven Englund *is a free-lance writer who specializes in French history and culture.*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

fees when they are victimized in a way contrary to public policy.

Of course, the old liberals are intent on protecting the masses whether the masses like it or not. Only the new liberals have confidence enough to let the masses themselves decide what kind of governmental protection is appropriate.

WAYNE K. LEMIEUX, ESQ.
Westlake Village, Calif.

The author replies:

Mr. Thorpe is right in referring to arbitration as a less costly alternative for resolving disputes. He is evidently unaware that Legal Services Corporation [LSC] lawyers already serve the poor through extensive use of alternative dispute resolution, both as mediators and in arbitration. And when the poor do have to go to court—typically because they are haled there—they still need publicly assisted lawyers to achieve even a modicum of public justice.

Mr. Lemieux is right in noting that the middle class are underrepresented by attorneys in many of the legal problems that beset them. But he doesn't argue for expanding the provision of legal aid to the middle class. Instead he urges the British system of shifting legal fees to the losing party, a dicey remedy for poor and middle class alike.

Lemieux is plainly wrong in imagining that LSC is a centralized bureaucracy. On the contrary, of all federally funded programs, LSC is one of the most decentralized. Since federal funds account for less than 25 percent of the needs of poor people, local committees decide which needs are more urgent priorities.

Lemieux describes federal support for LSC as "massive." In fact it is exceedingly parsimonious: The amount of federal aid appropriated for LSC has never approximated the very modest goal of funding two lawyers for every 10,000 poor people. Even if this aid were more generous, the fact that many in the middle class suffer injustice does not negate the validity of aiding those who cannot afford to pay *any* legal fee.

My argument, based on the equal dignity of all persons before the law, may indeed be old, not in the sense in which we speak of "tired old liberals," but in the sense with which we venerate the ancient obligations set forth in the commands of Deuteronomy (16,19) and in the very core of our commitment to "equal protection of the laws." As for my failure to "explain why the U.S. government should ride to the rescue," the general obligation of equality is found in the Fourteenth Amendment, which was added to the United States Constitution precisely because the states could not be trusted to do equal justice without that federal guaranty. So central is the theme of equal justice under law to our American system that none of us—whether old liberals or neoconservatives—should let the 104th Congress trample upon it or treat it with contempt.

EDWARD MCGLYNN GAFFNEY, JR.

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BAREFOOT-INGENUE-WITH-INCENSE

David O'Rourke

Large and long meetings of church personnel have to have a Mass. You cannot bring a hundred or more church workers together for several days without one. Well why not? They're believers, aren't they?

Yet, in this day of commonplace spectaculars, the organizers can't simply arrange an ordinary Mass. They have to plan a Big Liturgy. The larger the group, the bigger the liturgy; like inviting the in-laws to their first dinner at your house, the stakes are high. The hosts of a church meeting know that every one of their liturgical moves will be compared and critiqued. Their professionalism and their positions on the issues of the day are on the block.

Planning a Big Liturgy, especially in a hotel or convention center, can be daunting. Fortunately there is now a formula. And the formula is available: printed programs from previous conventions; audio and video tapes, official and pirated; and a growing number of technicians familiar with the required electronics, from equalizers to pink sound—all available to would-be Mass planners.

About fifteen years ago, when the formula was in the making, one of the elements introduced to great acclaim was the barefoot-ingenue-with-incense, the BIWI. Liturgies are meant to start with processions, so big-time liturgies must start with big-time processions. The traditional processional cross and candles just won't do as the show opener—hence the BIWI.

Got up in a belted, ankle-length, but not-too-filmy *crêpe de Chine* gown, barefoot of course, and carrying a several-gallon, earth-colored pot, the BIWI appears at the door, long-steps to the foot of the entry aisle, and prepares to lead the way. The earthen pot, of course, is visibly aloft and smoking with incense.

Processions usually advance in a slow-paced, stately way, but the BIWI, devotee of the dance that she is, must keep her feet in constant motion. With the smoking pot aloft above her head, she has to do a lot of light-footed lefting and righting up the aisle, this in contrast to the oxen-paced linearity of everyone else in the procession. Hopping around underneath a large incense pot, however, can look as though you're fighting à la Stan Laurel to keep the thing from crashing down upon your head. To show design and not inadvertence, the BIWI must keep hefting the pot up in the air, now to the right, now to the left, now back up to the right, all the while dancing side-to-side. And, of course, smiling—ingenuously.

My first encounter with a BIWI was in a concrete-floored auditorium, in winter. At her first appearance, I thought we were being picketed. But I was assured, "No, I think it's part of the plan—something new." The weather was cold, the aisle was long, and like many of those watching the BIWI dart from side-to-side on the cold, concrete floor, I was tempted to tell her when she finally reached us at the altar to set down her warm pot and put her frozen feet on top of it.

But, seated on the stage, facing out and quite visible, I had to behave myself. Memory had already reminded me that this was not "something new." I had seen this performance many times before: in my youth, at the Rivoli Theater on Saturday afternoons. It was rare, indeed, when Sinbad, Ali Baba, Moses, Victor Mature, or the Cobra Lady would enter their respective temples without a throng of BIWIs. And the *crêpe de Chine*? Filmy. Very filmy for a ten-year-old.

When it comes to spectaculars, Hollywood does it better. And the trouble with the BIWI is that her proper medium is entertainment, not liturgy. Most church people, whatever we may say about them as liturgists, are better prepared to worship convincingly than to entertain convincingly.

In a society in which the principal leisure-time activity is watching television, the temptation to let TV entertainment become normative is great. Those of us who want to involve people in worship, education, politics, or social services compete with TV. But that fact does not have to mean that we should try to beat the tube at its own game. It does not mean that we have to become entertainers.

The desire for spiritual nourishment is real enough. But I would like to believe that spiritual nourishment is not the same experience as entertainment. There is no reason, of course, why spiritual values cannot be articulated and translated into visual and auditory media in ways that do not subordinate them to the media, whether it is song or dance—the church has been doing this for almost two thousand years. But it does mean that those of us responsible for the liturgy—from presider to choir director to planner—have to articulate and explain those spiritual values and beliefs in ways that artists—singers, dancers, musicians—can understand. That this requires great effort should not be a surprise; nor should it be seen as peripheral to the church's worship. When we succeed, the liturgy carries spiritual values in a way that entertainment cannot.

We have not succeeded with the BIWI. □

David O'Rourke, O.P., *resident at Saint Mary Magdalen parish, Berkeley, California, is writing a book on fundamentalism.*

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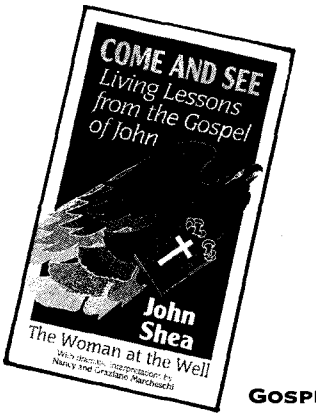

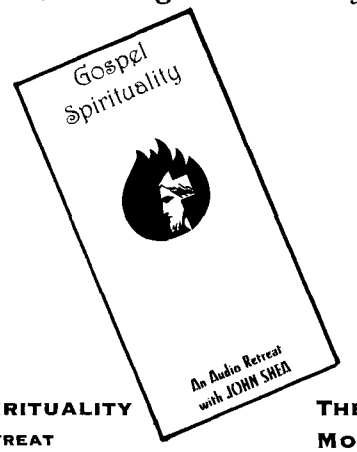

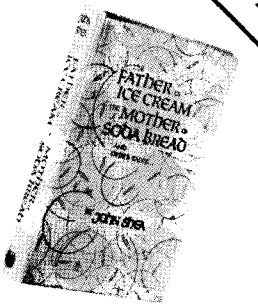

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